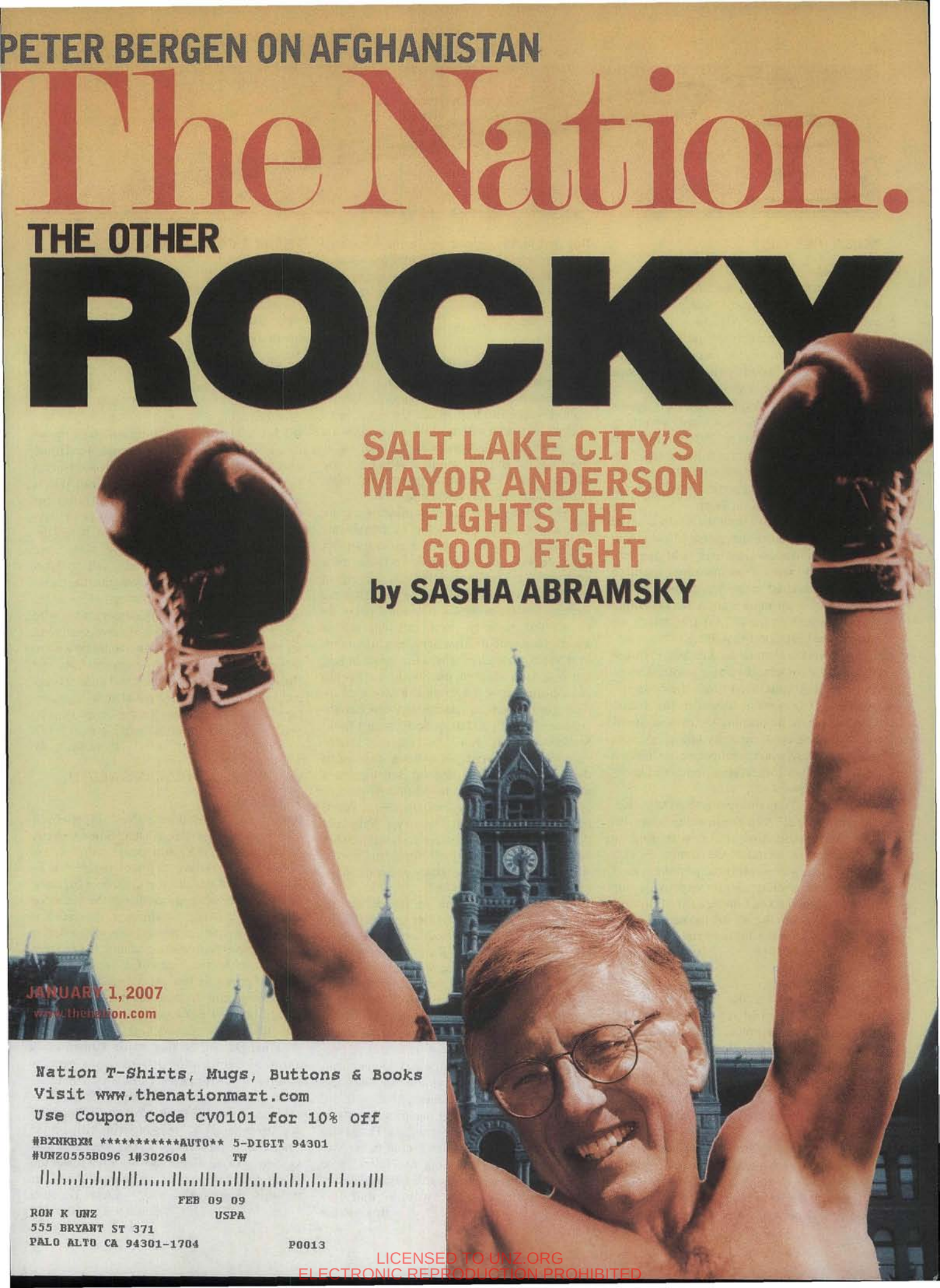
PETER BERGEN ON AFGHANISTAN

The Nation.

THE OTHER ROCKY

SALT LAKE CITY'S MAYOR ANDERSON FIGHTS THE GOOD FIGHT

by SASHA ABRAMSKY



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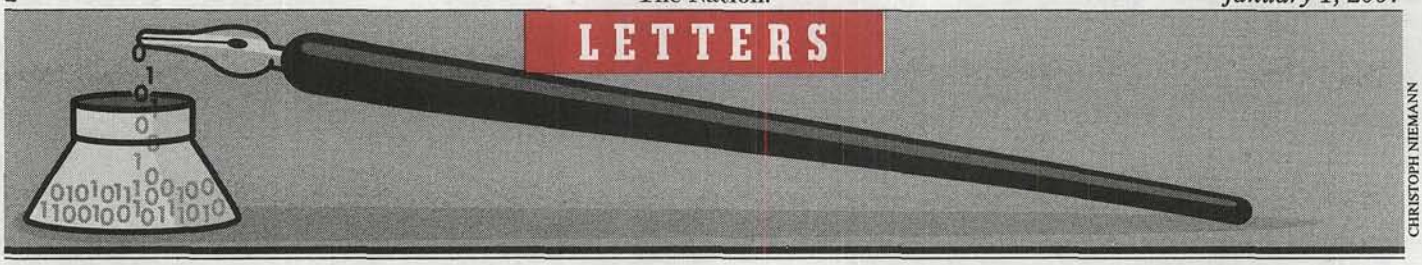

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

WHISTLING DIXIE

Minneapolis

■ I admire the spirit of Bob Moser's impassioned "A New Southern Strategy" [Nov. 27], saying that Democrats should not write off the South in future elections, and I hope he is eventually proven correct. But I fear that his plea is premature, based on this year's evidence. The South is the only section of the country where the Democrats did not pick up significant gains in House races. Indeed, a winning strategy for Democrats in 2008 might be to say that the Republicans are becoming a regional party, out of touch with voters in the Northeast, Midwest, Pacific Coast and, increasingly, the Mountain West.

Moser's good news from the South is based on Democratic Senate victories in Missouri and Virginia. But Missouri is actually a Midwestern state, with its more Dixie-accented southern counties voting red in the Senate race. In Virginia, the overwhelming margin in a razor-thin victory came from the DC suburbs, which are much more East Coast than Dixie.

For years the Democratic Leadership Council and other conservatives have warned Democrats that they must water down their progressive ideas if they want to win in the South. That has meant dampening the enthusiasm of many working-class, minority and progressive voters elsewhere, whose indifference has hurt the party more than conservative Southern Democrats have helped it.

The hopeful sign this year is that Democrats can win without Deep South white voters. In 2008 they should concentrate on shoring up their support in the rest of the country. Florida and Virginia, with substantial populations of Northerners, should also be targeted, along with hurricane-racked Louisiana and populist-friendly Arkansas. But it's still too early to place much hope on winning over the rest of the South. Maybe in 2010. JAY WALLJASPER

Kansas City, Mo.

■ Bob Moser writes that "in the Bible Belt Ozarks of southern Missouri, [Senator-elect Claire] McCaskill emphasized her blue-collar message without running away from her progressive positions." True, but Moser leaves the impression that Ozarkers actually voted for McCaskill. In fact, the Senator-elect didn't come vaguely close to winning a single Ozarks county, where her vote percentages ranged from 25.2 percent (Barton County) to 42.6 percent (Greene County, home of two secular universities and a relative bastion of enlightenment). In booming, aptly named Christian County, McCaskill drew a mere 35.3 percent. Was she honest? Sure. But that hardly helped her in the benighted Missouri Ozarks, which in 2006 (as always) voted more like Tom Frank's Kansas than did Kansas itself. DAVID DUNLAP

MOSER REPLIES

New York City

■ While my story focused on the significance of Democratic Senate victories over incumbent Republicans in Missouri and Virginia, Democrats also took five Republican US House seats in Dixie and came within whiskers of capturing two more. Jay Walljasper doesn't count that as "significant." But it's not too shabby when you consider that Democrats targeted fewer races in the South than anywhere else.

As I will argue at length in these pages in a future issue, Walljasper's notion of a uniformly conservative South where Democrats can't compete without watering down their "progressive ideas" is simply false. His suggestion that Democrats in 2008 should "say that the Republicans are becoming a regional party"—i.e., a Southern party—as a campaign tactic is a disturbing echo of Tom Schaller's argument, in *Whistling Past Dixie*, that Democrats should not only steer clear of the South in 2008 but should run against the South as a way of whipping up resentment against conservative Republicanism. Morally and strategically, such a "non-Southern strategy" would be a disaster. Democrats would be the party of national division; at the same time they would further alienate a region that is projected to contain 40 percent of the US population (read: electoral votes) by the 2032 elections. And whatever Walljasper thinks, a party that demonizes the South will not have a prayer of picking off Southern "border states" like Virginia, Arkansas or Louisiana—or Kansas, for that matter.

As for Missouri, there are few debates of longer standing than whether that culturally divided state is "really" Southern or Midwestern. But I think we can all agree that the Bible Belt of southern Missouri is as Dixie as it gets. David Dunlap is correct that Senator-elect McCaskill didn't win the Ozarks. My point was that, like Jim Webb in Virginia, McCaskill took her message of economic populism directly into the "reddest" parts of her state and purloined enough votes in Missouri's Republican stronghold to put her over the top statewide. In Greene County, for instance, McCaskill did five points better than in her previous statewide race—while Republican Jim Talent did five points worse. McCaskill credits her victory to her success in cutting into Talent's vote (along with Rush Limbaugh's Michael J. Fox impersonation). I take her word for that.

BOB MOSER

THANK A CONSERVATIVE TODAY

Burke, Va.

■ Wrong, wrong, wrong—"It's Over For Bush" [Nov. 27]. The Dems who won ran as conservatives. You think Heath Shuler is in your camp? Ya think Jim Webb is in your camp? Where's Senator Lamont? Oh, yeah—he got stomped by the pro-strong-defense Lieberman. The facts are not on your side. MIKE LONG

Manlius, NY

■ I am a registered Republican (leaning independent) who voted for a Democratic House and Senate. Why? Because (1) neoconservatism is absolute insanity; (2) the Iraq War is destabilizing and inflaming (rightfully) the world against us; (3) 1 and 2 trumped everything else; (4) "W" and President Cheney deserved a thumpin'.

Maureen Dowd said it very well on *Meet the Press*—41's team has to reprogram the brainwashed 43 from the neocon cult. It was the independents and thinking conservatives who voted against W, and they deserve the credit for the midterm election. You would be wise to recognize that we didn't vote against Alito and Roberts or for illegal amnesty and guest-worker programs, transvestism or NAMBLA. If you interpret this as a mandate for the liberal agenda, you could be back outside looking in in 2008. TONY SKLANEY

LEARNINGS FOR GLORIOUS *NATION*

Philadelphia

■ In "The Tao of Borat" [Nov. 20] Richard Goldstein misunderstands Sacha Baron Cohen's comedy in both the *Borat* movie and *Da Ali G Show*. I don't believe "a joy of bigotry" is as much a part of the allure as Goldstein suggests. In the theater where I saw Borat, the audience alternated between laughing at the satirical parts and gasping at the sections where Baron Cohen coaxes people into revealing their darker prejudices. At the heart of his comedy is a satire of provincialism—in the villages of Eastern Europe and in small-town middle America. In both cases racism and anti-Semitism are still alive, well and highly deserving of critique. On top of this Baron Cohen adds another layer focusing on Americans' general ignorance of life in Eastern Europe. Obviously no journalist, even a bumpkin from "Kazakhstan," would openly advocate killing "the Jew" or buying a 12-year-old wife with a tight "vageena" to push his plow. The revelation and skewering of all of the above is what make the Borat shtick so pointed, so successful and, at its heart, progressive. CHRIS VECCHIO

(Continued on Page 24)

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EDITORIALS

Recognizing Labor

Anyone in the United States can join a political party, a faith group or a community organization simply by signing up. But such freedom of association stops at the workplace door. When workers try to form a union under current rules, they run a gantlet of antiunion intimidation and propaganda from their supervisors and outside consultants while waiting for a union election. In half of all election campaigns, employers effectively threaten to close the workplace if workers unionize, and in a typical recent year bosses disciplined or fired at least 23,000 workers for trying to form a union. But the penalties even for illegal behavior are minuscule.

In large part because of such harassment, the percentage of workers in unions has been shrinking dramatically in recent decades. Now only 12.5 percent of workers are union members—from a high of about 35 percent in the mid-1950s—even though 53 percent of nonunion, nonmanagerial workers say they would like to belong to a union. The country's basic labor law, which was passed in 1935 and still declares that it's national policy to encourage collective bargaining, now obstructs union organizing more than it helps.

That's why unions are pushing hard for the new, Democrat-controlled Congress to pass legislation that would make it easier for workers to form a union. The proposal, the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), would guarantee recognition of a union when a majority of workers sign union cards—hence the phrase "card-check recognition." It provides for mediation and then arbitration if management and the union can't agree on a contract, and it greatly strengthens penalties for unfair labor practices.

In the first decade after the 1935 law was passed, most workers organized unions through card-check recognition, and in recent years most workers who have successfully organized have used the same technique, such as 5,000 janitors in Houston and 22,000 Cingular Wireless employees in the past two years. When employers are not hostile and unions organize a workplace through card checks rather than elections, the unions are much more likely to win. Without this new law, employers will continue to ignore cards and demand elections, even though the only thing these elections have in common with democracy is the casting of ballots. Simple recognition when a majority of workers sign cards is a more democratic process for protecting the right—enshrined in national and international law—of workers to join a union.

Even in the last Congress, the EFCA legislation, sponsored by Senator Ted Kennedy and Representative George Miller, had the support of forty-four Senators and 215 Representatives, including some Republicans. Labor unions played a key role in winning the Democratic majority in the new Congress, mobilizing more than 200,000 volunteers and spending record amounts for a midterm election, including $40 million from the AFL-CIO alone. And incoming Speaker Nancy Pelosi has promised to put EFCA on the fast track, aiming to bring the bill to a vote by early spring. The legislation will face harder going in the Senate.

The legislation will not succeed even in the House without a massive push, not only by mobilizing the army of union stewards and activists from the AFL-CIO but also by all progressive organizations. This is not just a labor issue. It's first of all an issue of basic human rights and democracy, including freedom of association and speech. Strengthening workers' rights is also

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critical for creating a fairer, more just America. There is a direct link between the decline of union power over the past three decades and the rise of economic inequality and the shift of economic risk from employers and government to individuals. Members obviously gain most from unionization, but all workers—and society as a whole—benefit. Where unions are stronger, all wages are higher, pensions and healthcare plans are better, workplaces are safer and poverty rates are lower.

Stronger unions are a necessary, if not by themselves sufficient, requirement for the rebirth of a broader progressive movement, especially where it concerns bread-and-butter issues. When workers are in unions, they are more likely to vote for economically progressive candidates. In the November election, for example, white born-again Christians as a group voted for Republican House candidates by a 41 point margin, but white born-again union members voted Democratic by a 15 point margin. The Employee Free Choice Act is a critical first step toward making life more fair and secure for average Americans.

COMMENT

Pinochet's Legacy

Millions of Chileans got an unexpected gift December 10, on International Human Rights Day. The country's 91-year-old former dictator, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, was plucked from this earth shortly after midday.

Many of us who survived General Pinochet's dictatorship (I escaped Chile, where I had worked as a translator for Salvador Allende, the elected President overthrown by Pinochet) would have preferred the tyrant to have lived just a bit longer—long enough to stand trial on one of the multiple counts of murder, torture and kidnapping pressed against him as a result of his seventeen-year reign of terror. But greater forces intervened.

Pinochet's very name came to symbolize all the horror that can follow when democracy is supplanted by dictatorship. Even now there are those who justify his brutal rule by citing statistics of economic growth. But there's another, more chilling set of numbers that will forever define the Pinochet dictatorship: In a country of barely 11 million at the time he seized power, 3,200 were murdered by the state, more than 1,000 disappeared (some of them thrown into the ocean, others into pits of lime), tens of thousands were tortured and hundreds of thousands fled into political exile.

Pinochet also embodied a wave of authoritarianism that swept through all of Latin America during the time of his rule. Similar dictatorships imposed their own brand of fear as they clamped down on Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru. Encouraged originally by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and then nurtured by the Reagan Administration and rising Thatcherism in Europe, Pinochet and the continent's other allied military regimes instituted a savage free-market capitalism that in many cases reversed decades of social welfare reforms. At bayonet point, unions were outlawed, labor laws were abolished, universities were stifled,

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COMMENT

national healthcare and social security programs were privatized, and these already unequal societies were further stratified into rich and poor, strong and weak, favored and invisible.

Their network of terror, Operation Condor, coordinated from Santiago and encompassing intelligence agencies from neighboring countries, included assassinations from Buenos Aires to Rome to the streets of downtown Washington, where in 1976 Pinochet's agents detonated a car bomb that killed Chile's former US Ambassador Orlando Letelier and his associate, Ronni Moffitt.

But Pinochet's legacy also stands as a monument to other, more uplifting, human values. The so-called Pinochet Precedent was born in 1998 when, during a visit to London, Pinochet was arrested on a Spanish extradition warrant for the alleged murder of Spanish citizens. His detention by the British was a historic turning point for international human rights: In a global era, no longer can violators of human rights roam beyond their borders with impunity.

It's a precedent that should be seriously pondered by those in our own government who believe they can bend and break the rules of human dignity and international law and pay no price. Already, lawyers in the United States and Germany are asking the courts to apply the Pinochet Precedent to Donald Rumsfeld, Alberto Gonzales and other American officials who ripped a page from the Chilean dictator's playbook and instituted practices of torture—from waterboarding to simulated executions—in US military detention centers.

Amazing and satisfying what a little justice can do. Once Pinochet had been captured, and after 503 days in British custody, his swagger had evaporated. He shrank from invulnerable strongman to wanted war criminal. Upon his deportation to Chile, two decades of social taboo were shattered, and he was indicted for murder by the courageous Judge Juan Guzmán Tapia. At the time of Pinochet's death, more than 200 criminal accusations were still pending against him.

Pinochet departed the scene discredited and reviled. The nation he once ruled with an iron first has only partially recovered from the trauma he inflicted. But his legacy must continue to be examined and investigated. This magazine, its editors and readers have a proud history of standing on the front lines of efforts to shine light on Chile's dark past.

Hundreds of murders and disappearances still seek resolution. There are still too many Pinochet collaborators and enablers who have not been called to account—and that includes Kissinger. The investigation into the murders in Chile of American citizens Charlie Horman and Frank Teruggi, two friends of mine whose lives were snuffed out in their youth, must continue. And the US government must release classified documents it still holds relating to Pinochet's role in the Letelier-Moffitt assassinations.

So a brief timeout to dispose of Pinochet's remains. Then back to the work of exhuming the truth. MARC COOPER

Marc Cooper, a Nation *contributing editor, left Chile under UN protection eight days after the Pinochet coup. His memoir of the period,* Pinochet and Me, *is now available in paperback from Verso.*

Morality of the Minimum

SWEET VICTORIES

Aside from the Democratic triumphs in the House and Senate, the unmistakable "Sweet Victory" of the year was the resounding six-state sweep of minimum-wage hikes from ballot initiatives in Arizona, Colorado, Missouri, Montana, Nevada and Ohio. Despite the media's conclusion in 2004 that "moral values" appealed only to people who oppose abortion, gay marriage and stem-cell research, the minimum wage emerged as the clear values issue of 2006. No group was more fundamental to the effort of linking the minimum wage to morality—and mobilizing these "values voters"—than Let Justice Roll.

A coalition of more than eighty faith-based, labor and community associations, Let Justice Roll initially grew out of a collaboration between the Center for Community Change and the National Council of Churches. In 2004 the Center for Community Change held an event in Columbia, South Carolina, in which it invited Democratic and Republican candidates to address poverty. According to the Rev. Paul Sherry, national coordinator of Let Justice Roll, the rally was a great success, and as a result the planners threw fifteen similar events across the country to get "poverty on the radar screen."

From these events it became clear to the organizers that a campaign to raise the minimum wage was the best strategy for addressing the crisis of poverty in a specific and immediate way. They also found that it was immensely popular with people of varying ideological stripes—making it, as Sherry put it, "a viable option in a rather conservative period." In spring 2004 Let Justice Roll officially launched its operations, building membership with organizations like ACORN, the AFL-CIO, the Interfaith Alliance and Bush's and Cheney's own United Methodist Church.

From day one, Let Justice Roll stressed that increasing the minimum wage was an economic *and* a moral issue. "We believe it's an issue of morality, because it's about where we draw a line as a society and say, 'This is the lowest we'll go and no lower,'" said Holly Sklar, the author, with Sherry, of *A Just Minimum Wage*. "Our bottom line is this: A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it." In its first major campaign to link wages with morality, Let Justice Roll organized Living Wage Days across the country during Martin Luther King Day weekend in 2005, holding rallies and worship services at churches and community centers across the country.

Thanks to the visibility of the Living Wage Days and other public events, Let Justice Roll was instrumental in helping secure minimum-wage increases in Arkansas and North Carolina. "With the momentum of these victories, we knew we were on to something and felt we had a good chance—so long as we maintained our coalition—to help see initiatives pass in several other states in 2006," said Sherry.

In the targeted states, Let Justice Roll affiliates mobilized petition drives to get initiatives on the ballots and began organizing local coalitions and creative meet-ups. In Montana, organizer Kat Wright brought together a diverse group from Missoula's faith-based community for Sacred Text Study Nights, in which

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COMMENT

Methodists, Lutherans, Quakers, Jews and Buddhists discussed how their religions deal with issues of poverty. The Missoula coalition, which called itself "Many Faiths, One Voice," held a large rally in Caras Park and engaged in door-to-door discussions about the moral imperative of raising the minimum wage.

Katy Heins, an Ohio organizer, said the issue was particularly resonant in Ohio, which has been ravaged by job losses in recent years. "People were working hard and still lining up at food pantries—and this showed that there was something not right economically, but also wrong morally," said Heins. "It led to a strong surge of people of faith who are saying, 'I'm concerned with poverty and the war and other things that are going on in our country, rather than just the gay marriage issue and the abortion issue.'"

Come election day, increasing the minimum wage proved overwhelmingly popular, transcending partisan lines in states like Missouri, where the initiative passed by 1.5 million votes, and Montana, where it passed with 71 percent support. In the wake of the victories, Sherry says he's received inquiries from Kansas, Tennessee, Oklahoma and Georgia about starting similar campaigns. As Let Justice Roll continues its work in the states, it is also fighting to boost the federal minimum wage, stagnant at $5.15 for a record-breaking nine years and four months. Democrats have promised to increase it within their first 100 hours in office, but with the threat of a Bush veto, Let Justice Roll will continue to press hard. "He's indicated that he's not opposed to an increase, but of course you can never be too sure about Bush," said Sklar.

"We think we succeeded, along with others, in making the minimum wage issue *the* values issue of the 2006 campaign by appealing to people's better instincts," says Sherry. "We helped people of faith see that if their faith was to be genuine, the minimum-wage issue was a significant vehicle to translate their convictions into a functioning reality. While other issues might divide people of faith, this one united them."

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL AND SAM GRAHAM-FELSEN

CALVIN TRILLIN

FOUR OPTIONS THAT THE BAKER-HAMILTON REPORT OFFERS TO THOSE PROSECUTING THE WAR IN IRAQ

To think about fading for Hail Mary passes.
To sink this report in rhetorical gasses.
To stop seeing progress through rose-colored glasses
And recognize this as the worst of morasses,
From which we must exit, though slow as molasses.
To simply do something to cover their asses.

Kucinich Tries Again

Dennis Kucinich is running for President again, and yes, the passionately antiwar Congressman from Cleveland would love to cure what ails the United States. But first, he wants to cure what ails his own Democratic Party.

The Democratic disease, as diagnosed by Kucinich, is caution at the party's leadership level about moving to end US involvement in Iraq. "Democrats were swept into power on November 7 because of widespread voter discontent with the war in Iraq," says Kucinich. "Instead of heeding those concerns and responding with a strong and immediate change in policies and direction, the Democratic Congressional leadership seems inclined to continue funding the perpetuation of the war."

That is not the typical opening salvo for a presidential bid. But Kucinich is not a typical candidate. When he ran for the nomination in 2004, he said a lot of things that grassroots Democrats were thinking. But he didn't say them in a way that won him many delegate votes—only around 70 of the 2,162 needed to secure the nod.

Still, Kucinich's candidacy merits attention because his presence in the debates—which should be assured by his status as a former mayor of Cleveland and a six-term Congressman re-elected this year with 66 percent of the vote—should sharpen the discussion among Democrats regarding the war. As Kucinich rightly points out, that sharpening is needed in a party that still struggles with the question of an exit strategy.

This time around, many antiwar Democrats focused on the potential candidacy of Wisconsin Senator Russ Feingold, an early and consistent opponent of the war. But after the election Feingold decided to remain in the Senate, where he will chair key subcommittees on the Constitution and Africa.

Kucinich has decided to try to fill the void, saying he will bring a blunt antiwar message to the campaign trail and to every debate. In particular, he will take on Democrats who have voted to keep funding the war. Kucinich argues that Congress should provide the money for an orderly withdrawal of US troops from Iraq but that it should not continue to meet Defense Department demands for continued funding of a long-term military presence there. "Unless and until Congress decides to force a new direction by cutting off funds, the United States will continue to occupy Iraq and have a destabilizing presence in the Middle East region," argues Kucinich, who wants Democrats to challenge supplemental funding requests from the Pentagon.

Concern about the war runs deeper now than in 2004, but there is no guarantee that will improve Kucinich's chances this time. There may be another candidate—Barack Obama—who, while not as pure or precise on the issue as Kucinich, has a record of opposing the war from the start and supporting a redeployment timeline. If the media frenzy that greeted Obama's recent trip to New Hampshire was any indication, it's a good bet that the Illinois Senator will be given many more opportunities to deliver his message than Kucinich. If Obama does not run, former North Carolina Senator John Edwards is likely to

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position himself as the candidate with a plan to bring the troops home.

Kucinich, however, is undeterred in his drive to mount an aggressively antiwar presidential quest. "On November 7, 2006, the American public voted for a new direction for our Iraq policy," says Kucinich. But if troops are still there in two years, "the voters will not forget who let them down." JOHN NICHOLS

The Waiting Game

First, Washington waited—and waited—for the Iraq Study Group report. Once the bipartisan panel issued its verdict (the war is nearly lost) and unveiled its not so impressive seventy-nine recommendations (withdraw combat troops by early 2008 if conditions permit; boost training for an Iraqi military yet to demonstrate coherence, competence or loyalty to a working government; lean on that fractured Iraqi government to achieve national reconciliation; talk to Iran and Syria), the capital redirected the waiting game at George W. Bush, who promised to offer his own plan after New Year's. But few policy-meisters within the Beltway expect a major shift from the White House. (Incoming Senate majority leader Harry Reid met with Bush and concluded, according to spokesman Jim Manley, that Bush is "not interested in any dramatic change.") So Washington could soon be waiting for another set of players to weigh in: the Democrats. Come early January, the party will have the power to do more than grouse about the war. But anyone anticipating quick and decisive action from the Dems will have to keep waiting.

In the new Congress there will be much Iraq-related activity, but the Democrats will present no master plan to remove America from the debacle. They will mount a flurry of hearings, scrutinize the war budget and introduce differing bills. Senators Carl Levin, Joseph Biden and Jay Rockefeller—incoming chairs, respectively, of the Armed Services, Foreign Relations and Intelligence committees—plan an array of hearings. Levin aims to examine the military strategy in Iraq. He might continue his quest to dig up information on the Pentagon cell, created by former Under Secretary Douglas Feith, that funneled misleading intelligence to the White House before the war. Biden, who has proposed turning Iraq into a federation of three autonomous regions, intends to examine alternate policies. Rockefeller is looking to complete the long-delayed Phase II inquiry of the Administration's use (or abuse) of prewar intelligence.

On the House side, Jack Murtha, who will take over the defense appropriations subcommittee, wants to probe misuse of reconstruction spending. Henry Waxman, next chair of the Government Reform Committee, will zero in on fraud, waste and abuse in military contracting. Tom Lantos, incoming chair of the International Relations Committee, also wants to probe the reconstruction failure. And Ike Skelton, in line to head Armed Services, has vowed to examine the strain the war has put on the military and the adequacy of assistance to the troops.

Although Reid and Speaker-to-be Nancy Pelosi are trying to coordinate the hearings on their respective sides of the Capitol, they could become a hodgepodge. "At the moment, we are focused specifically on the first two weeks, which will be the 'Six in '06' priorities," says a Pelosi aide, referring to legislation on domestic issues Pelosi hopes to pass immediately. It might have been wise for the Democrats to plan one prominent set of joint hearings, a series that would focus on all Iraq matters. But that's not how a Congress full of hard-to-control chiefs tends to operate.

Before, after or during this blitz of hearings, the Dems may introduce legislation pressuring Bush to start disengaging from Iraq. Senator Levin, who advocates a troop withdrawal starting within four to six months, estimates that there are at least fifty senators who would vote for such a measure, and he says several Republican senators have expressed interest.

Levin, Biden and Reid are all touting the possibility of a bipartisan resolution urging Bush to change course—a prospect enhanced by several Senate GOPers who recently broke with the White House: Chuck Hagel called on Bush to "begin planning for a phased troop withdrawal"; Gordon Smith decried Bush's Iraq policy as "absurd," noting that it "may even be criminal" and urging a withdrawal "quicker rather than later"; Sam Brownback demanded that Bush lean on the Iraqi government to achieve a "political equilibrium," even if that entails partitioning the country.

Legislators can pass resolutions demanding that Bush remake his Iraq policy, but the Decider in Chief is free to ignore them. Congress has power only over the war's financing. This spring the Bush White House is expected to ask for another $100 billion or so for the war. But Democratic Senate and House leaders have said they have no interest in compelling a withdrawal by choking off funds. Representative Jim McGovern, a liberal Democrat from Massachusetts, has been pushing legislation for the past year that would defund the war. The House leadership, he says, "does not have a lot of sympathy for this. Some Democrats do not want to be blamed for losing Iraq." McGovern, whose bill has drawn only nineteen supporters, notes that many Democrats still hope Bush will disengage so they don't have to do the heavy lifting of forcing a pullout. "But," he adds, "the Bush strategy is to push the war on to the next Administration. There will be action [by the Democratic-controlled Congress], but not enough to extricate ourselves."

Pelosi, Reid, Levin, Murtha and most Democrats advocate withdrawal in some form. The question is, How hard will they push? "We're going to continue to hold the President's feet to the fire," says Manley, Reid's spokesman. But, he adds, "at the end there's only so much we can do." Which means the waiting—and the war—will likely continue. DAVID CORN

ON THE WEB: Katrina vanden Heuvel critiques the mainstream media's rush to blame the Kremlin for the radiation poisoning of an ex-Russian spy; Emily Jane Goodman, a New York judge invited to observe Venezuela's election, discovers a functional democracy, reliable electronic-voting technology and a passionate, engaged electorate; and David Enders reports from Jordan on how some Iraqi groups are making tentative moves to stem sectarian violence.

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

War: Voters Said No, Congress Said Yes

First let's yield the floor to a Republican, Senator Gordon Smith of Oregon, who recently proclaimed, "We have no business being a policeman in someone else's civil war. I welcome the Iraq Study Group's report, but if we are ultimately going to retreat, I would rather do it sooner than later." Not cut and walk. Cut and run.

Now let's go to a Democrat, Representative Silvestre Reyes of Texas, Pelosi's pick as head of the House Intelligence Committee. The freshly anointed Reyes told *Newsweek*, "We're not going to have stability in Iraq until we eliminate those militias, those private armies. We have to consider the need for additional troops to be in Iraq, to take out the militias and stabilize Iraq...I would say 20,000 to 30,000—for the specific purpose of making sure those militias are dismantled, working in concert with the Iraqi military."

Reyes comes to his important post with an open mind, meaning an empty one. He knows nothing of the region. This became clear in his brief parley with a reporter from *Congressional Quarterly* who had the impudence to ply him with questions at the end of a tiring day, when men of mature judgment head for the bar. *CQ*'s man asked Reyes if Al Qaeda was Sunni or Shiite. Reyes tossed a mental coin. "Predominantly—probably Shiite." Wrong, of course, since Al Qaeda is Sunni, of a notoriously intolerant strain. It's as if Reyes had called the Pope a Presbyterian.

Then the pesky newshound probed him on the matter of Hezbollah. "Hezbollah. Uh, Hezbollah..." Reyes answered irritably. "Why do you ask me these questions at 5 o'clock?" Back in 2002 Reyes, a Vietnam vet, was opposed to the war. Give him clout as Intelligence Committee chair and he starts citing John McCain approvingly, even upping the mad Arizonan's troop-boost call by 10,000.

At least Gordon Smith can publicly concede that as things stand, the Iraq mission is a disaster, and quitting time is here. No prominent Democrats in Congress besides Jack Murtha can bring themselves to do that. (I include here Senator Slither, otherwise known as Barack Obama, who trims to every shift in the wind.) The language is always of pleasing schedules, in which a (fictional) entity called the Iraqi Army, at the disposition of an (imaginary) power called the Iraqi government, can be welded into an (entirely fantastical) nonsectarian force by (as yet unavailable and putatively suicidal) US military trainers.

Suicidal? A poll cited by the Iraq Study Group found that 61 percent of Iraqis believe that it is appropriate where possible to attack the US occupying troops. Since the poll included Kurds, who are less hostile to the US presence, we can assume that the percentage of Sunnis and Shiites who think it a patriotic act to shoot or blow up a US soldier is well above 61 percent. Now imagine yourself as a US trainer embedded in an Iraqi unit, the vast majority of whose members believe it right and proper to kill you. "Suicidal" seems to be the correct term. These calls for a bigger US training force are complete hokum.

You would have thought that Democrats would rush to hang their hats on the bipartisan ISG report, calling for cut and walk. But the long-awaited report is dead shortly after arrival. There aren't more than a handful or so of Democrats who are going to be caught in the same room as a report that calls for the return of the Golan Heights to Syria and dares to raise the issue of the right of return of Palestinians to their homeland. In America these days persons in political life can describe reality only if they are self-employed, with a guaranteed independent income and above 75 years of age. Jimmy Carter and James Baker are two prime examples of this truth. Otherwise fantasy rules in Congress and the press, which has consistently misrepresented the extent of the disaster in Iraq, preferring to promote fatal illusions about a viable central government and fantasies of the United States being able to shape a new model army of Iraqis.

No reporter has played a more assiduous role in fostering these delusions than Michael Gordon of the *New York Times*. Gordon somehow skipped free of the misreporting charges that finally caught up with his former colleague Judith Miller, even though he shared a byline with Miller in the very worst report, the claim that aluminum tubes were hard evidence of Saddam's WMD program. In the past months, in the *Times* and on CNN Gordon has been laying down a propaganda barrage against speedy withdrawal and for a hike in US troop numbers in Iraq.

At the *Washington Post* David Ignatius has similarly been fostering the impression of feasible options in Iraq. "With enough troops and aggressive tactics," Ignatius wrote this year, "American forces can bring order to even the meanest streets." In March Ignatius, in Iraq, detected "unmistakable signs here this week that Iraq's political leaders are taking the first tentative steps towards forming a broad government of national unity that could reverse the country's downward slide." His keen eye detected a "new spirit of accord."

So here we have the *Times*'s and *Post*'s lead reporter/commentators on the war diligently promulgating the core fantasy: that the United States has options beyond accepting defeat. The vast majority of Iraqis want US forces out. Militarily the United States has been defeated. Diplomatically it is isolated. Politically it is immobilized. From the Republican defeats at the polls through to the publication of the Iraq Study Group report, there was a window for Washington to commence diplomatic operations to get out with all speed. That opportunity has almost gone. The House Democrats rejected Murtha. In the Senate they gave swift and unanimous approval to Robert Gates, a career intelligence faker with a shameful recent record at Texas A&M of opposing affirmative action. Let's see how many Democrats will oppose their leadership's recommendation that they vote to approve the supplemental budget appropriation early next year—probably $160 billion—which will give Bush enough money to keep the war going till he leaves town. Let's see if the anti-war movement can organize sit-ins in the offices of Democratic Reps preparing to vote those funds. ■

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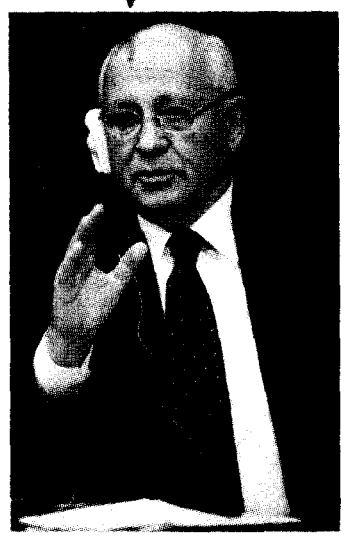

"I have always been an optimist, convinced that determination, solidarity and foresight can lead to positive change even in the face of adversity. Today we need more active optimists committed to building a safer, fairer and healthier future. The Optimist magazine encourages people to grasp the challenges of our times with both hands and take action."

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The **Green Cross Optimist** is more than a magazine: it is a global message encouraging positive action, solidarity and innovation for sustainable development and lasting peace. **The Optimist**, which is published quarterly, is dedicated to cultivating a stronger sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility in humanity's relationship with nature.

The **Optimist**, read by decision-makers and opinion-leaders around the world, fosters transparency, pragmatism and the resolution of conflicts between different interest groups in order to open up new avenues for partnership and innovation.

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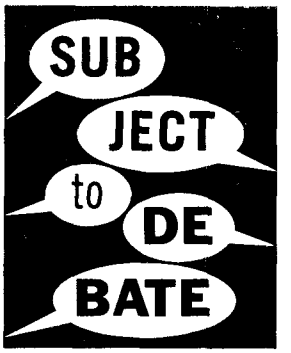
KATHA POLLITT

Ho-Ho-Holiday Donations—2006

Ho, Saturnalia! I read somewhere that altruistic behavior has the same blissful effect on the brain as romance and motherly love, so this holiday season, why not exhilarate yourself by being especially generous to the groups below?



1. The Indigenous Women's Political Caucus. Out of the fight against the South Dakota abortion ban and the spirited local campaigns of progressive Native American women comes the IWPC. Founded by brilliant organizer Charon Asetoyer, this new group will support grassroots activism on women's rights and social justice. They'll be lobbying the solidly anti-choice state legislature, building skills and support for future races—all the things the Democratic Party should be doing but isn't (NACB/IWPC, Box 572, Lake Andes, SD 57356).

2. Help Lesotho (HelpLesotho.ca). The small, landlocked, desperately poor African country of Lesotho has an HIV-positive rate of around 30 percent. Only 9 percent of kids graduate from high school. Help Lesotho keeps children in school, trains teachers, provides chairs, stoves, books and more to schools, promotes AIDS education and gives small stipends to grandmothers to help them feed their parentless grandchildren. If you'd like to be more personally involved, support and correspond with a needy orphan: $402 a year provides everything for one child (11 Keefer St., Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1M 2J9).

3. Loi Hua/Women's Promise. Remember Agent Orange? The Vietnamese can't forget. Thousands are still suffering from its use by the US military decades ago (birth defects, cancer, neurological problems, as well as devastating environmental damage). This small advocacy group, founded by a Vietnamese physician and an American public health practitioner, does scientific, legal and humanitarian work in support of Vietnamese victims. It is currently working on a class-action lawsuit against US manufacturers of Agent Orange (now on appeal after initial dismissal). Write your check to NCOSH, with "Loi Hua/Women's Promise" on the memo line, and mail to Trude Bennett, 2723 Old Sugar Road, Durham, NC 27707.

4. Women's Health and Justice Initiative. Fifteen months after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans is still a disaster area—especially for women of color. They were the most vulnerable before the hurricane and are much worse off now. The WHJI is opening a women's health clinic on the site of a shuttered clinic in Treme, one of America's oldest black neighborhoods. This is a new grassroots organization for which even a handful of donations would make a huge difference (Box 51325, New Orleans, LA 70151).

5. New Orleans Musicians Hurricane Relief Fund (NOMHRF.org). Because where would we be without jazz, zydeco, Cajun, gospel and blues? This group gives a helping hand to local musicians with such pressing problems as housing, instrument replacement, finding work. If you ever thrilled to Irma Thomas or Professor Longhair, it's time to say thank you. (800) 957-4026; 828 Royal St., # 833, New Orleans, LA 70116.

6. Health in Harmony (HealthInHarmony.org). Have you ever wished you could preserve the environment while providing medical care in the developing world? Here's your chance: Health in Harmony is a new, innovative organization that offers low-cost, high-quality care to impoverished rural people living around the beautiful, fragile, incredibly biodiverse Gunung Palung National Park in West Kalimantan, Indonesia (orangutans! sun bears! hornbills!). By promoting environment-friendly economic activity, HIH hopes to help animals, trees and people in one fell swoop (351 Pleasant St., #117, Northampton, MA 01060).

7. Bronx Defenders (BronxDefenders.org). This organization not only provides top-quality legal representation to low-income Bronx residents; it has a full staff of social workers and advocates to help them resolve the problems—poverty, mental illness, addiction, family dysfunction—that got them into trouble in the first place. Their commitment to "community-based lawyering" means the Bronx Defenders are involved not just in the courts but in local schools and social service provision. If every indigent defendant had help like this, there would be fewer people in prison and less crime too (860 Courtlandt Ave., Bronx, NY 10451).

8. *In These Times* (InTheseTimes.com). The left seems to think its magazines can live on air, then slaps its collective forehead—oh noooo!—when yet another publication gasps its last. Right now, before you forget, subscribe to our Chicago-based sister publication and help this lively monthly provide in-depth reporting, provocative commentary, reviews and, of course, the Appall-o-meter. *ITT* has lots of new, young talent on board, so prepare to be challenged and surprised. Already a subscriber? Give it to a library, a high school, your doctor's waiting room—at a low holiday rate of $19.95 a year (Box 1912, Mt. Morris, IL 61054).

9. *The Women's Review of Books* (http://wcwonline.org/womensreview). How many of you who complain about the paucity of women reviewers and the slighting of books by/about women subscribe to the *WRB*? I thought so. Well, give yourself a treat, and get up-to-date on everything from Doris Lessing's latest novel to Ayaan Hirsi Ali's latest polemic, with sharp analysis from Vivian Gornick, Dorothy Allison, Ann Snitow and other great minds that do not think alike. Spread the word with gift subs, at $33 (Old City Publishing, 628 N. 2nd St., Philadelphia, PA 19123).

10. National Center for Reason and Justice (ncrj.org). Thanks to the NCRJ's tireless efforts, Bernard Baran, imprisoned since 1985 in the wave of daycare-sex-abuse-panic cases that look so bizarre today, had his conviction overturned this year. Sadly, the injustice to Baran is not unique: Consider the Texas man convicted after a temporary boarder downloaded child porn onto his computer. Relying largely on volunteers, NCRJ gives crucial legal and moral support to innocent people charged with sex offenses—cases the other groups often won't go near—and fights for humane treatment of all prisoners (NCRJ, Box 230414, Boston, MA 02123). ■

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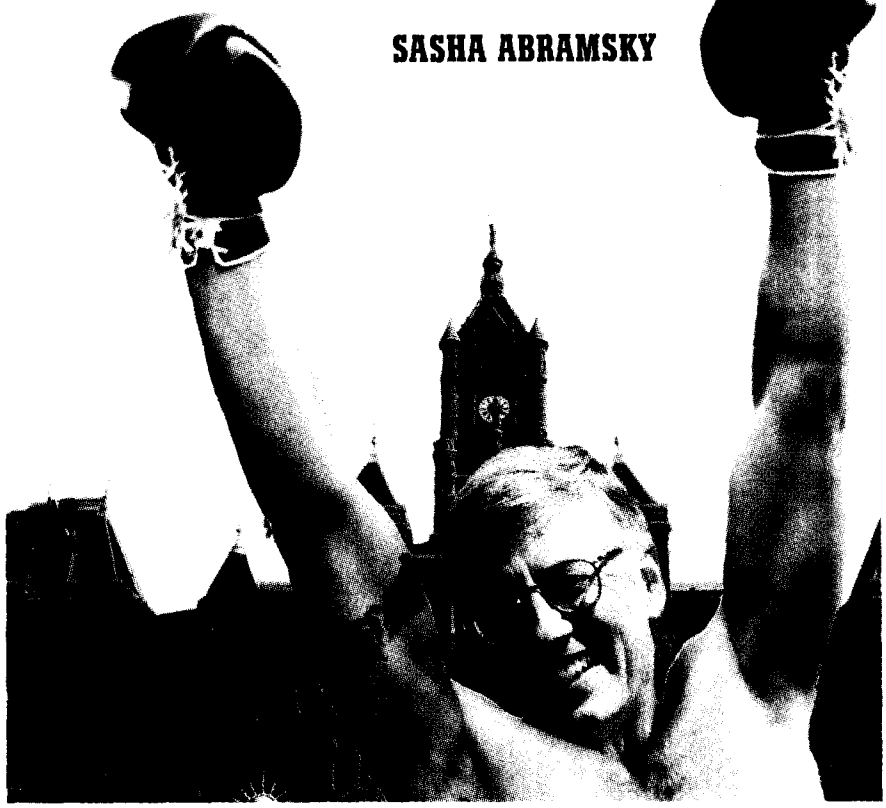
ARTICLES

THE OTHER ROCKY

SASHA ABRAMSKY



Standing at the top of the imposing stone staircase leading up to the entrance to City Hall on a blustery late August day, Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson finishes his speech denouncing George W. Bush, a man he calls "the most dangerous President the country's ever had," a leader he believes has precipitated an "incredible moral crisis" for America. Then, with no police escort, no men with guns protecting him, he bounds down the steps and descends into the five- or six-thousand-strong crowd. He's instantly mobbed. Hundreds of people, gathered to protest the presence of Bush, Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice at the American Legion convention in the nearby Salt Lake Palace, push toward him. Many appear desperate simply to catch a glimpse of the thin, medium-height, silver-haired man in the black suit, pressed white shirt and black-and-white-striped tie. They strain forward to shake his hand, to pat his back, to hug him, to talk with him or simply to throw words at him.

"You've got enormous balls!" a woman cries out. Without batting an eye, Anderson, in his deep bass voice, retorts, "Word's got out."

With his chief of staff, Sam Guevara, running ahead and turning back to snap digital photos, Anderson—who claimed to have spent more than thirty hours hunched in front of his computer honing his speech—joins the back end of the demonstration as the crowd proceeds up State Street to the federal building. He detours briefly to argue with some middle-aged women heckling him with bullhorns (at the urgings of state Republican Party leaders, thousands of the state's residents have been calling City Hall in recent days to protest Anderson's planned participation in the demonstration) and then continues walking. At the federal building, protest leaders deliver a petition to the offices of Utah's senators, urging them to begin impeachment proceedings against George W. Bush.

"You should run for President," people keep telling him, as they mill around in front of the heavily guarded federal building. Mindful that this is his last year in office, Anderson doesn't pooh-pooh the sentiment or issue exaggerated disclaimers. Instead he answers, carefully, that you need money to run, that you need a state machine backing you—which, in a place as virulently conservative as Utah, known until fairly recently as "the Mississippi of the West," is not going to happen for Anderson—that you need to know when to shut up and not speak your mind. Successful national politicians listen to handlers and spin doctors, and that's something he won't do.

Clearly, the 55-year-old mayor, a lapsed Mormon with more than a hint of the charismatic preacher about him, has given serious thought to the possibility of trying to become President Ross "Rocky" Anderson. But he's realized that despite the current unpopularity of Republican machine politicians, given the contours of the contemporary electoral system and primary process, a man such as himself can't win. "I'd be torn to pieces," he replies to one of his supporters. "If I thought I could win, I would. This country certainly needs leadership."

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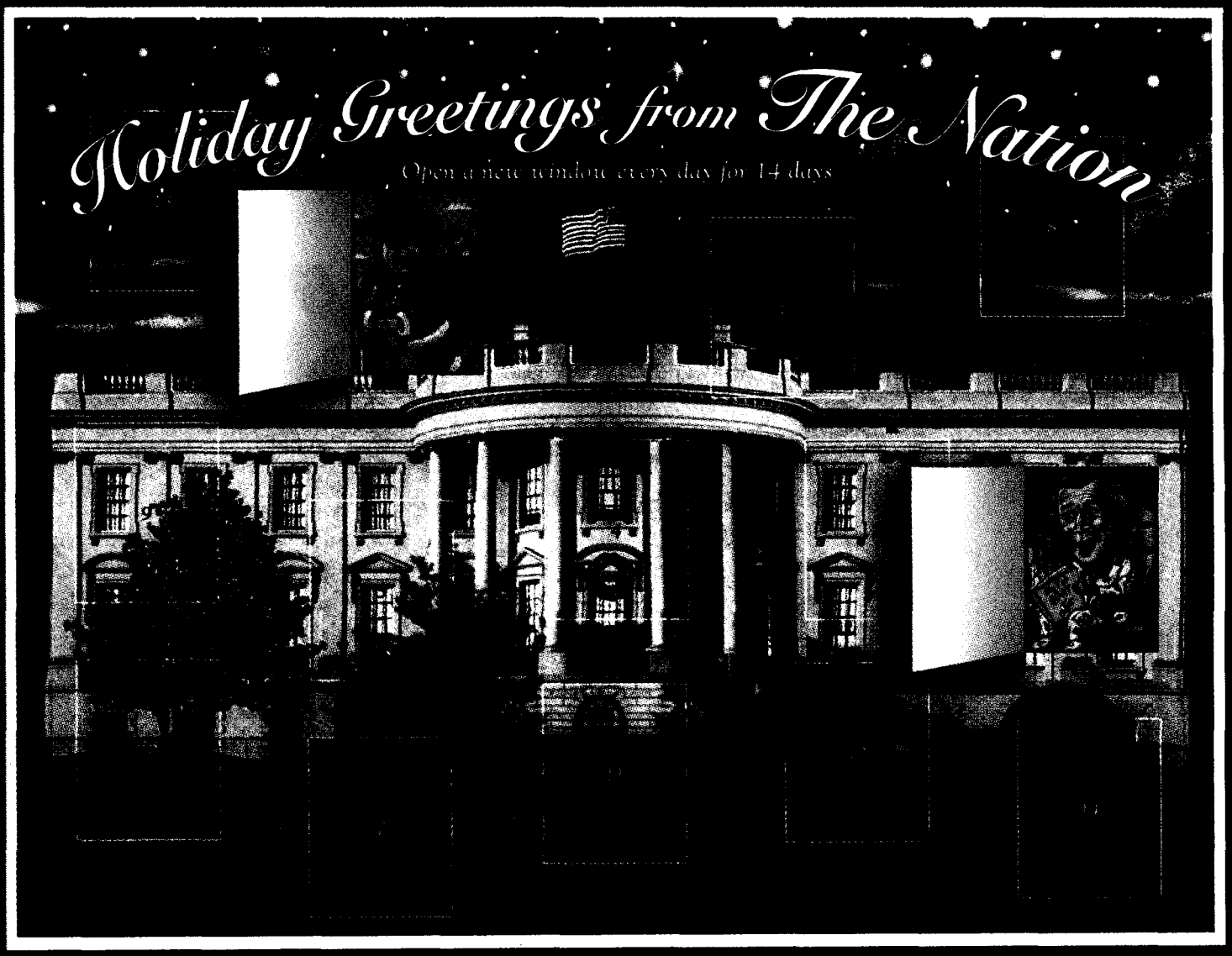

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In the mid-1990s Rocky Anderson, a successful local attorney and a longtime community activist who sat on the boards of several leading nonprofit organizations in Salt Lake City, ran for an open Congressional seat. To the dismay of Utah's conservative Democratic Party machine, Anderson, who first made ripples in local politics back in the 1970s, when he worked as an attorney with Planned Parenthood to open up Utah's restrictive antiabortion and anticontraception laws, won the primary. In the general election, however, he lost. Shortly afterward, he decided to run for mayor of Salt Lake City, and in 1999 he achieved an upset victory as a doggedly populist, anti-machine candidate.

Over the past seven years, Anderson has transformed the city. While outsiders who know little of the nuances of Utah politics might assume this nerve center for the Church of Latter Day Saints to be a bastion of conservatism, among those who track urban policy trends the city has become synonymous with some of the most creative urban government thinking in the country. In 2005 Anderson became a founding member of the New Cities Project, a group linking progressive mayors from around the country, and one that holds meetings twice a year on the fringes of the US Conference of Mayors.

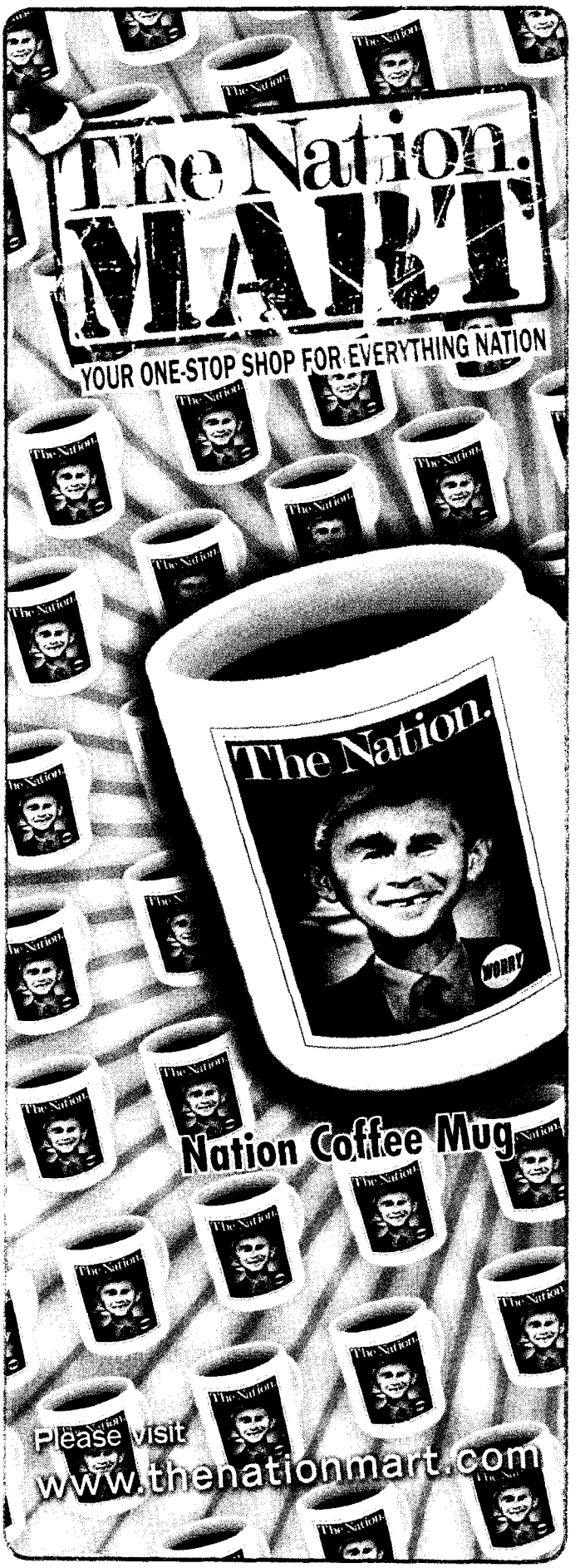
There is a sort of Camelot-in-the-Wasatch feel to Salt Lake City these days. Many of the mayor's younger staffers, plucked out of activism and into administration by the activist city government, call to mind the Clean-for-Gene college kids who campaigned for Eugene McCarthy in 1968: Dressed smartly, coiffed to a conservative T, many are having their first experience inside the halls of power.

Like his city, the grandiose religious and civic architecture of which points to ambitions for greatness lacking in most midsize urban centers, Anderson thinks big. He has pushed to implement the Kyoto Protocols locally, mandating that all city buildings use energy-efficient light bulbs, replacing SUVs in the city fleet with hybrid cars—his personal car is a Honda Civic that runs on compressed natural gas—almost doubling the city's recycling capacity in one year and starting a program to recapture and use for electricity generation the methane produced at the city's water treatment plant and landfill. "Global warming," he avers, "is clearly the most urgent issue facing our planet—we have an enormous moral obligation to change government policy and incorporate changes in our business and our government and our individual lives. Kant's categorical imperative has never been more applicable."

Largely because of his policies around global warming and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions locally, in 2005 Anderson was honored with a World Leadership Award in the category of environmental work. In November the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives brought Anderson to a summit at the Sundance Resort, in Utah, to discuss with other mayors ways to reduce urban usage of fossil fuels.

The Salt Lake City mayor has also changed the way city officials interact with their constituents, making his administration one of the most accessible in the country. Once a month, on a Saturday morning, Anderson and his staff, dressed casu-

Sasha Abramsky is a senior fellow at Demos and the author of Conned: How Millions Went to Prison, Lost the Vote, and Helped Send George W. Bush to the White House *(New Press).*



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ally, will walk around different neighborhoods, talking with locals and holding open mikes where residents can air their concerns. On Wednesday evenings every few weeks the mayor makes himself available for "one-on-ones" with his constituents. "He has the ability, if there's a social boundary, to break through it," says community liaison staffer Gwen Springmeyer, a longtime probation officer who initially felt the mayor was too out of kilter with the mainstream but who has since become a die-hard fan. During the 2002 Winter Olympics, despite the concerns of security experts, the mayor opened up the third floor of City Hall for parties, bringing together world-class athletes with some of the poorest of Salt Lake City's residents. He also rented out the Jewish Community Center for two more parties for locals. In passing, friends mention that he's been known to invite homeless people to sleep in his house.

Anderson has restructured the city's criminal justice system and, suspicious of the tenets of the war on drugs, thrown the Just Say No DARE program out of the city's schools. Instead of pushing for more and more low-end offenders to be sent to jail or prison, he has built one of the country's most innovative restorative justice programs, for which he was nominated for a second World Leadership Award—in December the judges in London announced that Stuttgart, Germany, had edged Anderson's city for the prize. Mental health courts now channel mentally ill criminals into mandatory treatment programs rather than dumping them behind bars; a misdemeanor drug court similarly replaces punishment with treatment; and the city now has one of the most active victim-offender reconciliation programs in America. People arrested for driving under the influence or soliciting prostitutes are sent through a comprehensive course of counseling rather than automatically being handed criminal records.

Under Anderson, Salt Lake City has become synonymous with some of the most creative urban government thinking in the country.

"I had the most unorthodox interview of my life," Sim Gill, Salt Lake City prosecutor for the past six years, recalls. When Anderson contacted him, Gill, originally from Chandragar, India, was a deputy DA for Salt Lake County and had built a reputation for thinking outside the box when it came to sensible punishments for criminal defendants. "We sat and discussed the meaning of life for the next hour, and ethics, and social responsibility. We connected on a principle of community service; he's very passionate about wanting to solve community problems. The question isn't whether we can fill up our jail beds. The question is, are we filling them up with the right kind of people? Jail should be a place we [only] put people who are a risk to our community."

On other fronts, Anderson has gone out on a limb to defend gay rights and has been an outspoken opponent of wholesale sweeps against illegal immigrants. He has turned the city into one of America's top relocation centers for refugees from war-torn spots of the world.

And last but not least, he has repeatedly taken on big developers, from "sprawl mall" advocates to those in favor of unregulated suburban growth in the large Salt Lake Valley region surrounding the 182,000-strong city itself.

"You do not expect this [these policies] to be coming out of this municipality, out of this state," Gill says. "And therein lies the hope of our political agency. That's what's wonderful about democracy. It is the freedom of dialogue to take hold. The landscape of democracy is always fertile to conversation, and has to be. Anderson's raising issues that need to be talked about. People forget: Democracy requires an ongoing dialogue."

In the corner of the mayor's office in a large cage is a green parrot. (The bird's name is Cardoso, and while Anderson has managed to teach him to do a chicken imitation, so far he's had no luck getting the bird to talk.) On the wall opposite Anderson's desk is a four-image montage of John Kennedy, painted by psychedelic art guru Peter Max. In the outer conference room is another Max quartet, this one a series of images of Anderson, whom the artist counts as a friend. Other objects of note in the office: a photo of City Hall with a gay pride flag hanging on the flagpole outside, a replica of the Olympic rings, articles on Anderson's election victories, a snapshot of the mayor with then-President Bill Clinton.

More than thirty years ago, as an undergraduate at the University of Utah, Anderson studied political philosophy, religious philosophy and ethics. He read books by Sartre and other existentialists, and, he remembers, he had a "powerful epiphany. We can't escape responsibility, there's no sitting out moral decisions, and whenever we refuse to stand up against wrongdoing we're actually supporting the status quo."

Three decades on, the angst of the existentialist student has been channeled into a nova burst of political energy and fury. "I really despise what politics has become in this country," he says. "Our elected officials are normally not leaders. They don't inform themselves. They're not driven by any particular passion on these issues."

He's speaking before the Republicans took a beating in the midterm elections, but his criticisms—of soundbite politics, of decisions via focus groups—aren't simply leveled at Karl Rove and his acolytes. "You can point to maybe two or three people in national politics that you can remotely call leaders." His list is somewhat eclectic: Robert Byrd, Russ Feingold, Joe Biden and Mitt Romney. At the top, however, is the Hamlet figure of Mario Cuomo, the quintessential philosopher-politician whose larger-than-life persona hovered in the background over the Democratic Party in the 1980s and early '90s.

"He's elevated the conversation about a range of issues," says Robert Newman, dean of the College of Humanities at the University of Utah and a friend of the mayor's—they are in a book club together, in which they have read such books as *"A Problem From Hell," The Devil in the White City* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. "A lot of people have been very thirsty for that here," says Newman. "His strongest legacy is, we have a not just behind-the-scenes mayor but a mayor who is front and center nationally and internationally. Rocky speaks from the heart. And people respond that way. There's a very visceral reaction to Rocky, whether it's positive or negative."

When Anderson proposed a law stating that the city would favor doing business with companies that paid a living wage to

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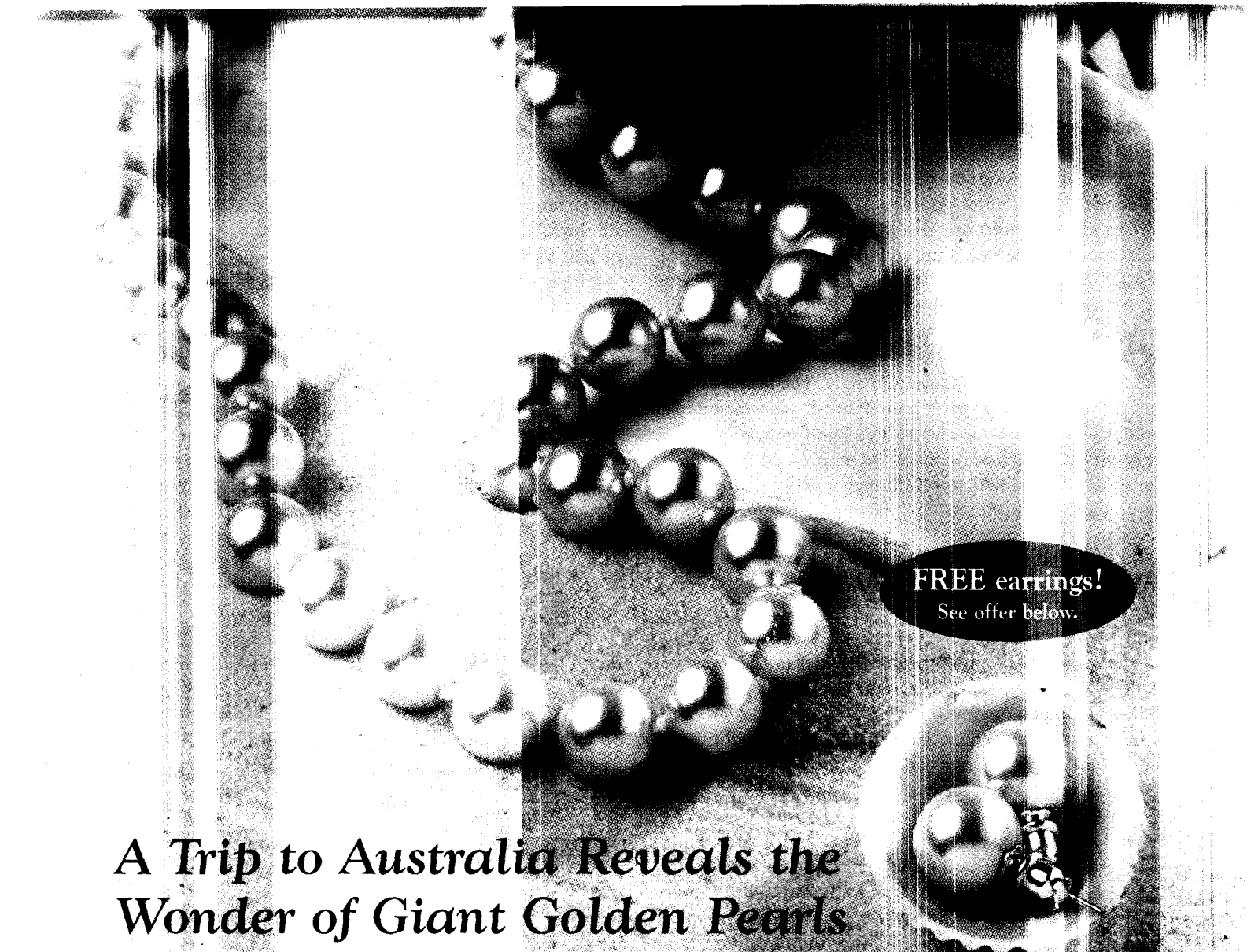

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Just before 1900, in a small isolated town called Broome Australia, fishermen came across the rarest oyster-a giant named the Pinctada maxima. This world's largest oyster contained the voluptuous South Sea Pearl—the most sought after pearl in the world. After this discovery, Broome soon became the dominant pearl trading post in the world and literally 80% of all worldwide pearl trading passed through Broome.

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their employees, the conservative state legislature did an end run around this by passing a bill prohibiting municipalities from making contract decisions based on such criteria. He is, according to senior staff, often at loggerheads with councilmen, state legislators and the governor. Some go so far as to say that anything he supports, the legislature will oppose.

For Jeff Hartley, executive director of the Utah Republican Party, Anderson's style, his willingness to critique the Mormon Church, his defense of locally unpopular themes like gay marriage, make him, quite simply, "bombastic. The majority of Utahans take offense at his tone and style. The fact that he'd invite Cindy Sheehan and her brand of anti-Bush campaigning to the state—it seemed quite wrong to a lot of people."

In response to such sentiments, the mayor told the August demonstrators—who had stood through a series of mediocre warm-up speeches while they waited for him to get on-stage—"Blind faith in bad leaders is not patriotism. A patriot does not tell people who are intensely concerned about their country to sit down and be quiet in the name of politeness." The Bush Administration, he continued, was "an oppressive, inhumane regime that does not respect the laws and traditions of our country, and that history will rank as the worst President our nation has ever had." Quoting Teddy Roosevelt, he declared that silence in the face of injustice "is morally treasonable to the American public."

'When he sees something that is wrong and needs to be fixed, he's just fearless.'
—retired adviser Robert Archuleta

When I ask Hartley whether he thinks that it's Anderson's actions instead that border on the treasonous, there's a long pause. Finally he says, "It's one thing to be antiwar, but to do it in a way that undermines respect for the President emboldens the enemy—it makes them think, Why shouldn't they fight against what we're trying to accomplish overseas? Anderson's language is incredibly inflammatory."

Countering Hartley, sculptor and architect Steven Goldsmith—who first met Anderson in the 1970s—believes the mayor's combination of intellectual rigor and straight talking has made him something of "a folk hero of the American West."

When Anderson was elected mayor in 1999, Goldsmith was brought aboard as the city's planning director, with the goal of rejuvenating the downtown—in part by using money leveraged around the upcoming winter Olympics—by expanding the light-rail system, encouraging the creation of vibrant restaurant dining hubs, creating from scratch a premier jazz festival and helping to bring cutting-edge cultural events and speakers to town. The city even instituted a citywide book club. "Once Rocky emerged," the architect recalled, "you couldn't help but listen to this thinker. People attached themselves to Rocky's voice."

Seventy-three-year-old Robert Archuleta, the mayor's now-retired adviser on minority affairs and a longtime organizer among lower-income and minority Utahans, once gave Anderson a statue of Cervantes's Don Quixote, as well as a poem he'd written titled "Don Quijote, el Alcalde?" (Don Quixote, the mayor?). "He kinda reminds me of him. He's fearless," says Archuleta, a short man sitting in his small Westside home on the poor side of town, wearing a white vest, suspenders and gray trousers, his white hair a mass of curls. "When he sees something that is wrong and needs to be fixed, he's just fearless." Another senior employee quotes a Jack London poem, using its description of man as a meteor as a metaphor for the mayor.

"It's a great lesson in social discourse," says Goldsmith of his friend's tenure. "It's a great lesson to the kids of the city to stand up and do what's right. He addresses the social conscience of this community, and there's nobody else here to fill it."

The mayor's combination of pragmatic quality-of-life policies as well as ambitious, even utopian, programs around environmental issues has won him many enthusiastic fans. And his ability to improve Salt Lake City's infrastructure and make local government far more responsive has won him support even among people who do not necessarily sympathize with his outspoken prognostications on national and international politics. That's the formula that has allowed him to win two mayoral races, despite vocal opposition from most of Utah's political leadership.

With only a year left in office for Rocky Anderson, where does he go from here? In a more rational system, Anderson, having more than demonstrated his leadership during eight years in the mayor's office, would be a strong candidate for national office—a viable presidential contender, perhaps, and certainly Cabinet-level material. He would, for example, make a strong Secretary of the Interior. But despite the success of a new breed of Democratic populists in the November midterms, generally America's political system still gives a tremendous edge to machine-backed candidates. Given that he lacks the backing of state and regional party groups—or, to rephrase it, has the misfortune of being a strong liberal in a state and region with conservative party machines—could a man like Anderson, who plans to work on environmental and human rights issues once he leaves City Hall, ever make his way to Washington today?

As we move beyond the midterm elections, gratifying though they were for progressives, and into the next presidential election cycle, that's a crucial question. Clearly, there are leaders of tremendous moral and intellectual caliber out there—Anderson's example shows this, as does the rise of many strong liberals in the incoming Congress. But can the same system that catapulted Bush into the White House raise those people to national prominence at an executive level? Is today's system flexible enough to allow the emergence of national leaders and Cabinet secretaries who are thinkers as well as politicians, men and women of principle as well as ambition? Perhaps, but Anderson and others like him face an uphill path. After all, we have grown used to seeing candidates who appeal to the lowest common denominators in our politics win.

Rocky Anderson will likely never attain national office; but perhaps his most important legacy will be showing the country that voters, in some places, do make lofty choices when presented with truly inspiring candidates. ■

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The Katrina Factor

MICHAEL TISSERAND

In September 2005 electoral threats blossomed throughout post-flood New Orleans, painted on abandoned refrigerators and scrawled across boarded windows. Among the most prominent was the line that appeared on a New Orleans grocery store, right by the location where rescuers dropped off survivors from the Lower Ninth Ward. "Next time we are to vote for somebody who cares," it read.

More than a year later, we now enjoy the full opportunity to see if that somebody might be a Democrat. Yet early signs are not promising. During the first national campaign since Katrina, few speeches made by candidates of either party addressed the ongoing struggles of evacuees and the perilous condition of an American city, or the critical issues of race, poverty and the environment that were so horrifically illustrated when the dirty water started rising. Yes, a handful of midterm campaigners did remind voters about just what happened in New Orleans, among them Keith Ellison, elected to the House from Minnesota's Fifth District, who promised that the country will no longer tolerate "victims of natural disasters being left on the rooftops to rot." Ron Dellums, the mayor-elect of Oakland, told a meeting of African-American journalists that "Katrina was a metaphor for everything wrong in urban America." But most seemed to follow the script that Illinois Representative Rahm Emanuel, who chairs the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, laid out in an interview with the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. Katrina didn't show up in ads, he acknowledged, but it came up in conversations on the campaign trail. It's as if this year, Katrina was the subliminal issue. Either that, or it served mainly as cement shoes for the President. "It's about Katrina; it's about the conduct of the war.... This Administration is marked by gross incompetence," said new House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in her postelection wrap-up chat with *The NewsHour*'s Margaret Warner.

For New Orleans, the most dangerous outcome of the midterms would be if voters receive the message that Katrina was a terrible thing, a Republican blunder, but it's now over. Nothing could be further from the truth. The mental health infrastructure in New Orleans remains shattered, depression is a local epidemic and the suicide rate has officially tripled. Incredibly, some residents of public housing are still unable to enter their own homes, while the Department of Housing and Urban Development moves to demolish more than 5,000 public housing units. Unchecked insurance costs are preventing others from selling, buying or repairing property. Federal dollars are flowing to corporate bailouts and disaster profiteers, not to affected citizens, revealed an August analysis by CorpWatch, a San Francisco–based organization that previously investigated profiteering in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Stafford Act and other federal regulations are resulting in inhumane living conditions in evacuee shelter parks, including the notorious "Renaissance Village" in the town of Baker, near Baton Rouge, where entertainer Rosie O'Donnell spent the past year battling red tape just to establish a community center for the park's thousands of inhabitants. "Even in prisons, they have running tracks," O'Donnell told *Nightline*.

Another sign that Katrina is an ongoing disaster: Too often the only recourse for flood victims and activist groups is to go to court. In November a federal judge ordered the Bush Administration to continue to provide housing to evacuees, calling the Federal Emergency Management Agency's notification system "Kafkaesque"—only the latest indication that Homeland Secu-

Michael Tisserand's book Sugarcane Academy: How a New Orleans Teacher and His Storm-Struck Students Created a School to Remember *will be published by Harcourt in July 2007.*

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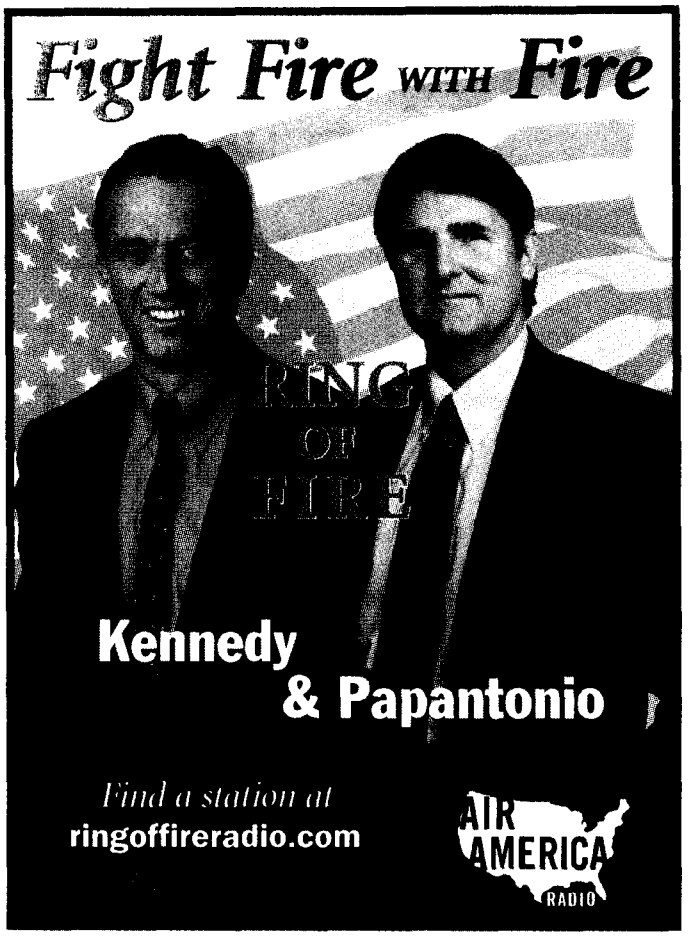
rity chief Michael Chertoff should be sent down the Rumsfeld road for his mishandling of Katrina.

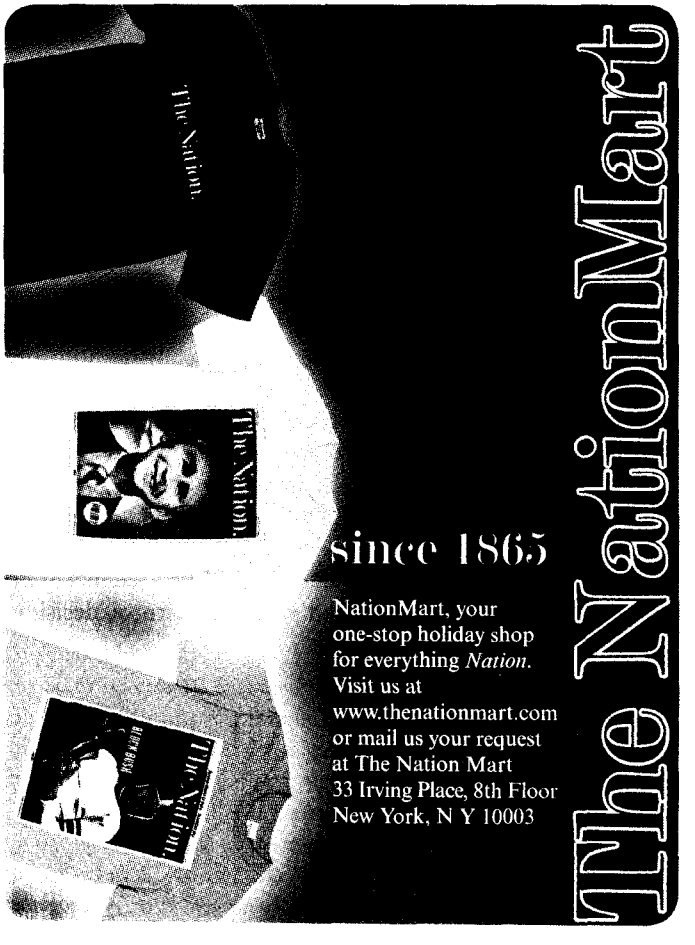
Democratic leaders must now loudly make the case for post-Katrina reconstruction they didn't make during the midterms. They should start by immediately launching an independent accounting of what went wrong with the Army Corps of Engineers' levees. So far, we have had one investigation by the Corps itself, and several independent investigations that seriously challenge the Corps's own reckoning. As Levees.org founder Sandy Rosenthal has pointed out, the real danger is that the Corps's faulty study will become the blueprint for repairs. A year ago, when Nevada's Harry Reid was the Senate minority leader, he stated unequivocally that the Democratic Party supported Category 5 levee protection. "The President seems to have shelved his grand plans for reconstruction," he said in November 2005. Now Reid is in a better place to roll out those plans himself.

As the new Congress presses for levee investigation and funding, it should also prioritize restoration of coastal Louisiana's wetlands. Without the wetlands buffer, levees aren't worth the dirt and concrete it takes to build them. An August study by a coalition of national and Louisiana environmental organizations, titled *One Year After Katrina: Louisiana Still a Sitting Duck*, calls on Congress to convene hearings immediately on the problem of the vanishing American coastline, and to complete all necessary wetlands projects within ten years. Coastline restoration could be partially funded by provisions in the Domenici-Landrieu revenue-sharing measure, which would provide a steady stream of dollars to Louisiana from Gulf oil drilling. (The Dems must insure that this bill is not, however, transformed into a ticket to expand drilling elsewhere.) In addition, the new majority must heed environmentalists' calls to close the Mississippi River–Gulf Outlet, the ill-considered shipping channel that helped destroy wetlands and acts as a live wire for hurricane surges.

The new Congress should also take on the Stafford Act's requirements that FEMA-sponsored housing be temporary. Such regulations don't anticipate the massive, long-term displacement of hundreds of thousands of citizens caused by disasters like Katrina. The National Urban League Policy Institute's report *Katrina: One Year Later* spells out other needed reforms, including the rehabbing of FEMA, flood insurance overhaul and Army Corps reform. Meanwhile, the Children's Defense Fund has proposed a Disaster Relief Medicaid bill to address the health needs of families after a disaster. This, too, should be a Democratic issue. Finally, the destruction of public housing in New Orleans must be immediately halted, until the quality of the current and proposed housing, and the effect on exiled New Orleans communities, can be fully considered.

More than anything, Democrats must set themselves apart by keeping their promises to Katrina survivors. At an August press conference in New Orleans, party leaders pledged that the first 100 hours of the new Congress would include bills to assist New Orleans by streamlining insurance, creating more affordable housing options and restoring the coast. But Pelosi's recently released "New Direction for America" didn't include one mention of post-Katrina needs. Such omissions offer cold comfort to New Orleanians who wonder if some leaders have stopped thinking of their home as an American city at all. ■

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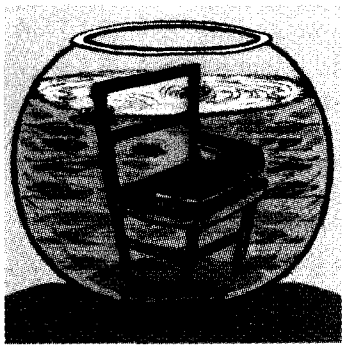
IN NEW ORLEANS'S REORGANIZED SCHOOL DISTRICT, THE NEEDIEST ARE GETTING LEFT BEHIND.

Katrina's Last Victims?

LISA DELPIT AND CHARLES PAYNE

One of the least remarked-upon aspects of the Katrina catastrophe has been its impact on the education of children in the Gulf Coast. As researchers who study urban education, we see both opportunities in New Orleans and the potential for a long-running disaster.



KAREN CALDICOTT

Before Katrina the New Orleans system was widely considered one of the nation's most dysfunctional, although it had begun to make progress in the year before the storm, judging by scores on state accountability assessments. It was always a system that worked for some children. As we heard a community activist point out, it worked for those few white students who stayed in it. Indeed, while black students in New Orleans ranked at the very bottom in state scores, white students' scores were the highest in Louisiana.

In the aftermath of the storm, the state assumed authority over 107 of the 128 public schools in the system, forming them into the Recovery School District (RSD). But it was only after the United Teachers of New Orleans filed suit—while pressure escalated from the affected communities amid growing evidence that a large number of children could not get in to any school—that three schools were opened through the RSD at the beginning of 2006. Meanwhile, the state has been evaluating proposals for charter schools, many from entities outside the state. (Charters are public schools not under the authority of the local Board of Education and thus, the hope is, free of stultifying bureaucratic strictures.) The plan is essentially to recreate the system as a virtually all-charter school district.

Charter schools remain controversial. The weight of the research suggests that students in charters typically do no better than students in regular public schools, and frequently do worse. (One part of the problem is that charter operators typically vastly underestimate what it takes to get a school up and running.) Still, we know of some excellent charters around the country and think they can be made to work in New Orleans. Our concerns have to do with the entire school district having few or no viable structures in place to monitor issues of equity for students or the quality of the teaching force, and with a pattern of decision-making that consistently excludes the communities most affected. Charters are just a way to structure school governance. Unless we change the traditional pattern by which the flow of resources has been shaped by race and class politics, we haven't changed anything fundamental.

In a decentralized system, who is responsible for the neediest students? The answer is likely to be no one. It is an invitation to re-create a system deeply segregated by race and class. We have already seen cases of special-needs children being refused admission to schools. According to Lance Hill of the Southern Institute for Education and Research, last year 2,000 special-needs students were completely locked out of the RSD and charter schools. At the beginning of this school year, there was only one person on the RSD staff to supervise the placement of 4,000–6,000 special-needs students. One high school, which previously served low-income African-American students and was mostly undamaged by Katrina, has essentially been handed over to Tulane University as a "selective admissions charter," which, since Tulane poured more than $1 million into building improvements, will serve largely the children of university employees. (And guess what? The school was already filled by late August!) At the extremes, a situation in which no one has to accept responsibility for the neediest children is likely to generate a set of publicly supported neo-segregationist academies, where enforced segregation according to class, special needs and test scores is as likely as segregation by race.

With no one to monitor the workings of schools that are required to maintain a certain level of scores on mandated tests to stay in existence, those students who are less likely to score well may be selected out or "pushed out" through any number of means. That is just what has happened in other parts of the world where charter school movements have taken hold, such as New Zealand, where charter reforms have led to increased segregation of rich and poor. One study reports that in the more elite charter schools, the suggestion to poor parents that their children "might not feel comfortable in this setting" turned into a promise if the parents insisted on registering them.

The staffing problems at New Orleans schools that were the inevitable result of the hurricane have not been handled well. The city school board fired most of the New Orleans teachers a few months after Katrina hit. Many of the charter schools, looking to save money, hired young, inexperienced teachers. Because the teachers' union contract was dismantled, educators hired in these schools could be paid whatever the school chose, and many had to sign a contract stating they would not discuss their salaries or working conditions publicly. One teacher hired in a charter school who brought only three years of experience to the job said

Lisa Delpit, executive director of the Center for Urban Education and Innovation at Florida International University, is the author of Other People's Children. *Charles Payne teaches African-American studies, history and sociology at Duke University and is the author of* So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistence of Failure in Urban Schools *(forthcoming). The authors are members of the National Coalition for Quality Education in New Orleans (NCQENO), an ad hoc group of national and New Orleans educators and scholars who have come together to address post-Katrina educational issues in New Orleans.*

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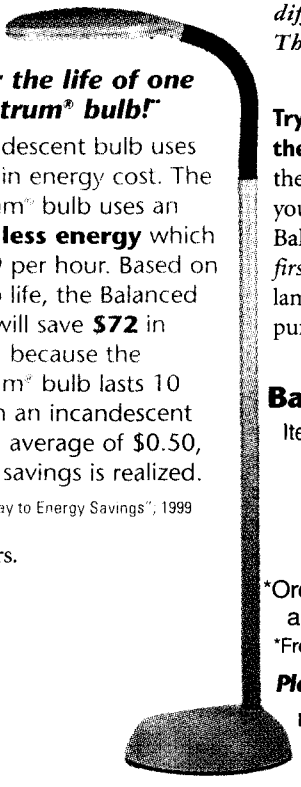

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that when looking for colleagues to assist her, she found she was the veteran for the entire school. Younger teachers can bring much-needed energy and optimism, but it's unlikely that they alone, without more experienced colleagues, can provide what is needed for traumatized children who have missed significant amounts of school.

The RSD, for its part, got off to a late start in planning for the current school year. As of late August, only 60 percent of the needed teachers were in place. As one would expect with so much late hiring, there have been reports of unusually high attrition rates among teachers. With Christmas looming and 250 new students returning to the city every week, RSD schools are showing an 8 percent vacancy rate for teachers, while the district is planning to open eleven more schools next semester. It is not clear where the instructors for those schools will come from. Meanwhile, FEMA and local officials remain embroiled in a dispute over how many schools need to be rebuilt and at whose expense.

We understand that some decisions had to be made in haste, with the information decision-makers had available to them at the time, and that some had to be made while most residents, certainly most low-income residents, were either out of town or overwhelmed. Even taking that into account, in the last several months we have seen a pattern in which decisions are repeatedly made with only pro-forma attempts to involve the people whose lives will be most affected. Even if the decisions are good ones, sooner or later this will likely cause problems. For example, the policy-makers in Baton Rouge, the state capital, did not work with local communities to determine the best locations for school openings. Consequently, some schools now have many empty slots and others are filled beyond capacity.

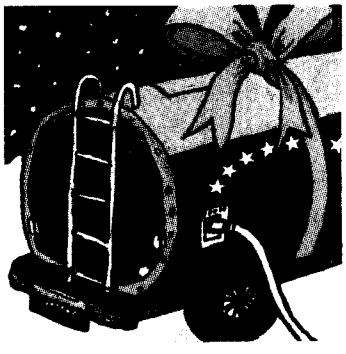
We expect to be criticized, among other things, as outsiders sticking our noses into local issues. We will live with that. In the wake of the storm, there was much talk about Americans having "discovered" inequality, having acquired a new appreciation for what happens to the most vulnerable of us when political institutions fail. Now it looks like those same institutions are giving us the equivalent of a school system designed by FEMA. The nation must pay the most careful attention to the children of New Orleans if we don't want the broken levees to sweep away the futures of children as they swept away so many homes and lives. ■

VENEZUELA IS PROVIDING DISCOUNTED HEATING OIL TO THOUSANDS OF U.S. CITIZENS.

Chávez's Citizen Diplomacy

LIZA FEATHERSTONE

"A Kennedy!" The older ladies of Spofford Hills, a housing cooperative in the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx, are brandishing cameras, thrilled to see the son of Robert F. Kennedy outside their building on this radiantly sunny day just before Thanksgiving. It doesn't hurt that Joe Kennedy is also president of Citizens Energy, a nonprofit providing heating assistance to low-income Americans, and that he's here to make a fuel delivery to Spofford Hills. But the real star of the day—though absent—is someone even more famous: Hugo Chávez.



KAREN CALDICOTT

Through Joe Kennedy's organization, the government of Venezuela—and Citgo, a petroleum company in which that country owns a controlling share—provides heating oil to poor and working-class Americans at a 40 percent discount. The gathering in the Bronx celebrated the program's second year, as well as its expansion: This winter, Citizens Energy and Citgo expect to deliver more than 100 million gallons of oil to more than 400,000 households in sixteen states, more than doubling the scope of last year's petro-philanthropy. Beneficiaries also include 163 American Indian tribes, most of them in Alaska.

The program has come under fire from the American right for its association with Chávez, whom the Bush Administration has painted as a dictator and even a terrorist threat. Recent TV ads promoting it—in which Citizens Energy praises "our friends in Venezuela"—have particularly infuriated the likes of Fox's Sean Hannity and inflamed conservative talk-show hosts, who are calling for a boycott of Citgo. (According to Citgo president Felix Rodriguez, the boycott and conservative attacks have had no effect on the company's revenues so far.) But Citizens Energy spokesman Brian O'Connor says his organization has asked every major oil company and every OPEC nation to provide such assistance to poor Americans; Citgo and Venezuela have been the only ones to agree. "We are very much in solidarity with the people of Venezuela," says Blanca Ramirez, treasurer of Spofford Hills, which was taken over by residents after a landlord abandoned it in the late 1970s. "But in a way," she muses, "they are even more in solidarity with us."

Spofford Hills is depressingly located across the street from a juvenile prison. On this day, however, the mood was upbeat as a large green truck drove up to the building and began delivering winter heating oil, a gift likely to save each of the co-op's sixty-two families about $200 this winter. Like many poor Americans, especially in the country's northern regions, the residents of Spofford Hills—a mix of working people, the elderly and public-assistance recipients—have in recent years, with the soaring cost of fuel, struggled to stay warm during the chilly season. "Last winter there were days we had to go without heat and hot water," says Ramirez, who is the mother of a

Liza Featherstone is a contributing writer for The Nation.

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4-year-old. "We couldn't afford it! We had to use space heaters and extra blankets—everybody tried to do the best they could." For the many elderly people in the building, the cold nights were a particular hardship. "I was afraid for her," Moryama Flores, a home attendant and building resident, says of her mother, who also lives in the building. "She was coughing a lot. She made many complaints." Says Ramirez, "This year, all these old people will probably not be suffering."

The ceremony at Spofford Hills included speeches from Kennedy, Rodriguez, Venezuelan Ambassador Bernardo Alvarez and New York Democratic Representative José Serrano, who has been an active force behind the program. Though it was undeniably unusual to see Democratic politicians, mainstream nonprofits and multinational corporations carrying out—and praising—the vision of a Latin American socialist leader, the tone was that of a straightforward, feel-good political event. Yet the proceedings began to take on a less-scripted and zanier quality when, just as the official remarks concluded, a couple of masked youth from the building next door dropped a big red banner, yelling "Viva Hugo Chávez!" No one seemed to have any idea who those guerrilla enthusiasts were. Undaunted and amused, everyone feasted on a Caribbean spread of yams, chicken and pie, as the hip-hop group Rebel Diaz played loud rap music, to which a smiling Rodriguez, dressed in jeans and work boots, gamely danced.

'Chávez is not an American politician. With our politicians, it seems like 80 percent of what they say doesn't happen.'—Patrice White, beneficiary

Though most of the US media remain hostile to Chávez, the fuel-assistance program is showing some Americans another side of the man and his government. Patrice White, a vocational counselor to the disabled who lives with her husband and three daughters in the Bronx's Mount Hope neighborhood, which began receiving Venezuelan oil last winter, is impressed that Chávez delivered on his promise to help poor Americans. "It was refreshing," she says. "Hugo Chávez is not an American politician. With our politicians, it seems like 80 percent of what they say doesn't happen." White was also impressed by the program's efficiency: "You'd think there would be lots of red tape."

Venezuela's reasons for running this program seem varied. Undeniably, it represents a bit of self-promotion on Chávez's part. More important, there is the delicious opportunity to insult the Bush Administration, which has close ties to leaders of the 2002 coup that briefly unseated the democratically elected Chávez, and to befriend those Americans who have the least reason to support conservative Republicans like Bush. But the program makes an even broader statement than that: By showing that the richest nation on earth requires foreign "assistance" to meet its citizens' basic needs, Venezuela reveals our most profound failure as a system. As Patrice White says, "It could be seen as a slap in the face to American capitalism. But I digress!"

When I speak with Felix Rodriguez, probably the only Texas oilman to pepper his conversation with words like "solidarity," he's full of kind words for America and its people. But he politely implies that Citgo wants to show Americans—and the world—another model of capitalism. "When people say, 'Citgo is a good company,'" he says, "we want that to mean not just that we are profitable, and not just that we are humanitarian. We want to—we have to—do both."

Perhaps most important, though, the heating-oil program is what writer and New York University historian Greg Grandin, who has spent time in Venezuela studying the Chávez government, calls "grassroots diplomacy." It provides Venezuela a way of building relationships with organizations that serve America's poor and working-class people, as well as with the people themselves.

In addition to the practical help, it is this last aspect of the program that most interests Bronx community activists. "We didn't want anyone coming here just to make a point," says Wanda Salaman, executive director of Mothers on the Move, a group that fights to improve the quality of life in the South Bronx, "but we understood the point." Intrigued by the opportunity to build a relationship based on understanding between peoples, rather than simply swipes between leaders, Mothers on the Move and other community groups established a coalition called Petrol Bronx, not only to insure accountability—that is, to make sure that Citgo's program continues to benefit the people it's supposed to help—but also to use it as an opportunity to educate their communities about Chavez's "Bolivarian Revolution" and to teach Venezuelans about conditions in the Bronx.

RodStarz of Rebel Diaz, who lives in the building next door to Spofford Hills, is working with Petrol Bronx to organize a hip-hop delegation to Caracas. "Young people here are being incarcerated at an alarming rate," he tells me, gesturing at the prison across the street. "The system in the United States is built for people like us to fail. Venezuela's trying to build something better."

Venezuela has encouraged this citizen diplomacy by bringing beneficiaries of the heating-oil program to Caracas. Along with sixty other beneficiaries, Patrice White traveled to Venezuela last April. Many other tenants in her building turned down Venezuela's invitation, spooked by State Department travel warnings branding the country as a dangerous destination for Americans. Even White's husband urged her to stay home. But she's glad she went. "I just fell in love with the place," she raves. "We all had a ball, and all of us want to go back." A guest on Chávez's radio show, White was impressed by his respect for his people's intelligence: He spent four hours explaining how Venezuelan oil reserves could be used to build stronger relationships with people in other nations.

Annie Simoneau, a homeowner in rural Vermont and a mother of six (four of her own and two foster children) who received Citgo's assistance last winter, also went on the April trip to Venezuela, with her husband, an apprentice electrician. She was moved by the respect they enjoyed—an unusual feeling for working-class people in the United States. "They [Venezuela]

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put us up at the Hilton and made us feel on top of the world," she recalls. "I'm not so much into politics—I just went over to thank him [Chávez]." But Simoneau says she also wanted to see the country's social programs and meet its citizens. She expected that Venezuelans might be hostile to American visitors, given relations between Chávez and Bush, but found none who were. "It was person-to-person. They entertained us, gave beautiful speeches, and for who?" She pauses, and marvels. "The poor people of America."

Person-to-person diplomacy may be increasingly important as the American right continues to attack Chávez. Having met Chávez, White speaks of him as if he is a well-meaning friend whose actions sometimes need to be explained to others. After the Venezuelan leader called Bush "the devil" in a speech to the United Nations, for example, several small Native Alaskan villages refused Venezuela's oil assistance (tribal officials did not return calls from *The Nation*). When White heard about that speech, she says, "I laughed. I was surprised, but I think he wears his heart on his sleeve and is a very genuine person." It's easy to understand, she adds: After all, the United States sometimes acts like a "bully." Simoneau's reaction to the incident is similarly indulgent. "He's very emotional," she says of Chávez.

Of course, not everyone will get the chance to travel to Venezuela, and some remain puzzled by Chávez and his motives. But with winter looming, even the skeptics are grateful for his help. "I hope what Hugo Chávez is doing for us, he's also doing for his own people," said Josephine Cruz, a Spofford Hills board member who works as a secretary in New Jersey. "But we got the oil. That's the main thing." ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

Minneapolis

■ Baron Cohen plays the Shakespearean fool, the noble savage, the village idiot. The perception of his naïveté or primitiveness allows him to lull the objects of his satire into a sense of security. When Borat (easily) got the frat boys to say slavery would be good and that minorities have all the power in our country, there was no laughter in the audience when I saw the movie, but rather a collective gasp.

Like alcohol bringing Mel Gibson's anti-Semitic ranting to the surface, Borat is the alcohol that elicits not very deeply buried prejudices in the people who share the screen with him.

SARA HURLEY

GOLDSTEIN REPLIES

New York City

■ The joy of Borat is feeling superior to the butt of his jokes. When the target is a benighted American, you get one kind of pleasure. But in this put-on everyone is the butt, including Borat himself. A hapless Central Asian visitor, he reeks of stereotype, and to the extent that these racial and religious signifiers are funny, part of the thrill is the forbidden *frisson* of bigotry. That's the power of Sacha Baron Cohen's art (when he chooses to engage it). He's in the *tummler* tradition of Philip Roth, and in this school of mordant comedy the sources of embarrassment are multiple and complex.

RICHARD GOLDSTEIN

IMMIGRATION BLUES

Borrego Springs, Calif.

■ I'm a German socialist, I have lived for seven years in this country, legally—and I read *The Nation*. I had to go to the US Embassy in Frankfurt to a special American doctor to be checked for my health before coming here. I couldn't have AIDS, a chronic illness, hemorrhoids, high blood pressure and so on. The medical examination took more than two hours. You can't get US residency unless you are totally healthy. Maybe you can understand that I'm very angry when I read that you see no difference between legal and illegal immigrants ["Letters," Dec. 4]. What are the laws for? It is mocking all legal immigrants in this country. Who is checking the health of illegal immigrants—bird flu, AIDS, the new aggressive form of TB? In Germany nothing like this could happen, because we believe in the law. A country that gives up its laws ends in anarchy, and we all know what that means.

PETER MYRDAL

San Jose, Calif.

■ This is not so much immigration as it is colonization. The majority of the Mexicans coming across our southern border illegally today believe that much of the Southern United States belongs to Mexico. I have read this in Mexican-language publications, and I have seen it on banners during demonstrations. My grandmother came across that border and became an American citizen because she believed in this country and wanted to escape the hell that Mexico was for poor women. The last thing she would have wanted was to see her beloved San Francisco become like Mexico.

I live in an area with a lot of immigrants, some legal and some not. Those who come here legally follow our laws and try to become part of our country while retaining their cultural values and identities. However, many of those who come here illegally do not follow our laws, for the most part, and the last thing they want is to become part of this country. They want to take what they can get and return to Mexico. Not all illegal immigrants are noble people trying to find a better life; some are just looking for a way to take advantage of Americans' openness and generosity of spirit. They also play on your liberal guilt.

The truth is, Mexico had the same advantages of climate and natural resources as did California. California became the seventh-largest economy in the world. Mexico is an economic basket case.

DAVID HOVGAARD

DEMOCRATIC PARTY PARTIES!

Belfast, Me.

■ Why is it not glaringly obvious to *The Nation* that the three female politicians in the December 4 cover cartoon have all been sexualized (with prominent cleavage) but that not one of the nine male politicians has been portrayed sexually? Do you not recognize this as sexism?

SARA SHUTE

Buffalo, NY

■ Dismayed, this white subscriber wonders what African-Americans will make of the December 4 cover cartoon depicting triumphant Democratic politicos' victory party. Of eleven Dems, ten of whom are shown playing musical instruments, there are two blacks. Charlie Rangel is the only figure not assigned an instrument; he just dances with an abandon that raises uncomfortable echoes of Bojangles. Meanwhile, Barack Obama rates an instrument, but the most trivial one of all: a triangle, which he strikes while displaying a glassy stare and gap-mouthed grin reminiscent of Stepin Fetchit.

TOM FLYNN

*An unscientific poll of the staff on this matter drew these observations: "*Oy vey, *to me, party time involves cleavage"; "if only I* had a *cleavage!"; "they do look rather breast-implanted—the cake looks good, though"; "one of the guys was depicted with a beard and another has a mustache—secondary sex characteristics—I think we're in the clear"; "that bagpipe looks pretty phallic to me"; "I thought the triangle symbolized that he's a triangulator, in the Clinton tradition"; "Bernie Sanders only got a whistle—is he going to cancel his subscription?"; "Uh-oh, there's champagne and a big cake—full of transfats, no doubt—prepare for denunciations from AA, OA and Mayor Bloomberg!"* —*The Editors*

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PHOTO COURTESY OF RORY STEWART

Waltzing With Warlords

PETER BERGEN

THE PUNISHMENT OF VIRTUE: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban.
By Sarah Chayes.
Penguin Press. 386 pp. $25.95.

KABUL IN WINTER: Life Without Peace in Afghanistan.
By Ann Jones.
Metropolitan. 321 pp. $24.

THE PLACES IN BETWEEN.
By Rory Stewart.
Harcourt. 299 pp. Paper $14.

In a dimly lit road in Wazir Akbar Khan, the Upper East Side of Kabul, a couple of street kids gesture toward an unmarked iron gate behind which they assure us we can find what we are looking for. An Afghan guard gives us a wary once-over and opens the gate onto a dark garden at the end of which a door is slightly ajar. I open it and step into a world far removed from the dust-blown avenues of Kabul, where most women wear burqas and the vast majority of the population live in grinding poverty.

At one end of a long room is a well-stocked bar tended by a Chinese madam who assesses us with a practiced calculus. In front of her are more than a dozen scantily clad smiling young Chinese women sprawled over a series of bar stools and couches. Adorning the walls are red lanterns and large posters of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan. Nestling next to the prostitutes are several mustached, glaze-eyed Afghan men who occasionally take unsteady steps onto a makeshift dance floor to bust some surprisingly graceful traditional moves. A couple of the women titter as they gamely join in. Welcome to Kabul, as David Lynch might imagine it.

Our party of four is soon joined by several of the women, who try to make conversation, most of which consists of "Me no speak English." Conversation is not really the point here when $60 will buy you more stimulating forms of intercourse. One of the prostitutes whispers in my ear, "You guys worry about the attacks?" She's referring to a massive car bomb that had blown up a day earlier a couple of hundred yards from the US Embassy, killing two American soldiers, one of them a 52-year-old female reservist, and more than a dozen Afghan bystanders. I arrived at the scene shortly after the attack and found body parts that looked like fried pieces of meat and bone scattered a couple of blocks away from where the bomb had exploded.

Kabul 2006 has a distinctly *fin de siècle* air. The hotel I stay at plays loungey house

Peter Bergen, a Schwartz senior fellow at the New America Foundation, is the author of The Osama bin Laden I Know.

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music at night and serves beer discreetly. It also has a makeshift bunker surrounded by sandbags in the event the hotel is attacked, a reasonable precaution given that in May an angry anti-American mob shot out the ground floor windows of another Kabul hotel. Suicide attacks are now weekly events in the capital, while an economy steeped in corruption and driven by the heroin/opium trade and foreign aid enriches an elite who party into the night, taking advantage of new freedoms that under the Taliban might have earned them a reprimand from the religious police (listening to music); landed them in prison (drinking alcohol); or had them stoned to death (sex outside marriage).

The Taliban owe some of their renewed strength to the fact that they can play on the fears of a generally conservative population who worry about corrupting foreign influences exemplified by the new brothels in Kabul. A hundred miles to the south of the capital, for instance, the Taliban have recently appeared in force in nearly half the districts of Ghazni province, which sits astride the key road between Kabul and the southern city of Kandahar. Around Kandahar this past summer fierce battles raged between the Taliban and NATO forces, who encountered much stiffer resistance than they anticipated. In September I embedded with soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division at a fire base on Afghanistan's eastern border with Pakistan. The Taliban launched rockets at the base on an almost daily basis, and foot patrols were regularly encountering Taliban forces. Three years earlier, when I was embedded in the same region with soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, their main complaint was how little action they were seeing.

Between the rising Taliban insurgency, the epidemic of attacks by suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and spiraling criminal activity fueled by the drug trade, Afghanistan today looks something like Iraq in the summer of 2003, when the descent into violent conflict began. As a former senior Afghan Cabinet member told me in September, "If international forces leave, the Taliban will take over in one hour."

A year ago there was still some real optimism about Afghanistan's future based on President Hamid Karzai's popularity both at home and abroad, the flood of returning refugees and the millions of girls and boys starting school for the first time. That optimism is evaporating. In December 2005, 77 percent of Afghans polled by ABC News said their country was going in the right direction. When asked again one year later, only 55 percent felt the same way.

What went wrong? The books under review supply pieces of that puzzle. Former British diplomat Rory Stewart describes his epic walk across Afghanistan in the winter of 2001, American author Ann Jones recounts the time she spent living in Kabul as an aid worker following the overthrow of the Taliban and American journalist turned aid worker Sarah Chayes writes of the years she lived in Kandahar following the American invasion.

Between the Taliban's resurgence and rising criminal activity, Afghanistan recalls Iraq in the summer of 2003, when things fell apart.

Chayes arrived in Afghanistan as an NPR reporter covering the war against the Taliban. She became disillusioned with the timidity of her editors and decided to embark on a new career as field director of an aid organization, Afghans for Civil Society. It was an often frustrating job: "The whole of Afghan society was suffering from collective PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)." The result, she says, was "an inability to plan for the future. Inability to think beyond one's own needs, excessive guile."

Settling in Kandahar, Chayes lived a critical part of the Afghan story often overlooked by international journalists and aid workers, who tend to have an insular, Kabul-centric view of the country. As Chayes explains, foreigners generally settle in the capital and "live apart from Afghans in guarded compounds. They do not walk about, but are driven by chauffeurs." Chayes, by contrast, lived with a local family, learned Pashto, kept a Kalashnikov by her bed and "loved the place." If this is cause for a smidgen of self-congratulation, Chayes is entitled to it. Kandahar, located in the middle of a desert that broils in summer and freezes in winter, is a deeply boring, ultraconservative Afghan city that is now quite dangerous for foreigners. For most of us a week's visit would suffice. Chayes lived there for four years.

A key theme of Chayes's angry, very well-written book is her gradual disillusionment with President Karzai, who early in the narrative is portrayed as a possible savior of Afghanistan, "remarkably cultivated" and "uniquely devoid of brutality and arrogance." The villain of Chayes's story is the uncouth Gul Agha Shirzai, who became governor of Kandahar with US support in December 2001. Once in office Shirzai built his "personal power base" with no regard for anyone other than his own tribe, which received the choicest American contracts, and he would allegedly bump off perceived rivals on occasion. Yet much to Chayes's frustration, Karzai seemed unable or unwilling to rein in warlords like Shirzai. "Instead of protecting the people from the warlords, curbing them, or removing them from office, Karzai seemed to be waltzing with them." In January 2003 Chayes, who was close to the president's brother Qayum Karzai, hammered out a plan of action about how to rid Afghanistan of the warlords. Item one of Chayes's plan, which she submitted to President Karzai, was: "Begin with Gul Agha Shirzai." Nothing happened.

The Punishment of Virtue is bookended by the murder of Chayes's friend Muhammad Akrem Khakrezwal, a police official who was killed in Kandahar by a supposedly random suicide bombing in June 2005. For Chayes, Akrem's murder crystallized all that is wrong with the country. He was the polar opposite of the warlords, a police chief who had served in a number of major cities around Afghanistan, who tried to work for the common good and was "the most able public official I encountered." After conducting her own investigation of Akrem's murder, Chayes concludes that it was not a random suicide attack but a targeted assassination. The murder remains unsolved, and we have to take Chayes's word for it that Akrem was the selfless patriot she paints him to be. It is a bleak ending to a bleak story.

Ann Jones, an American author who has written a number of books about women and violence, arrived in Kabul in the winter of 2002: "Kabul in winter is the color of dust...dust fills the lungs, tightens the chest. Lies in the eyes like gravel, so that you look out on this obscure drab landscape always with something like tears." Like Chayes, Jones has written an angry book about Afghanistan and, also like Chayes, she writes evocatively to illuminate another little-known world, that of poor, marginalized women in Kabul.

Unfortunately, Jones's reading of recent Afghan history is sometimes marred by a tendency to see sinister conspiracies where they don't exist. She writes, for instance, that the United States was initially willing to play ball with the Taliban in the mid-

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1990s because of energy interests eager to build a pipeline across the country from the gas fields of Central Asia and withdrew its support only because the Taliban could not provide "security" for such a project, rather than acknowledging the real reasons the United States turned against the Taliban, which were their antediluvian treatment of women and harboring of Al Qaeda. The one thing the Taliban *did* provide was security, which is why they had legitimacy and popularity when they came to power. And today, five years after the occupation of the country by the United States, there is still no pipeline across Afghanistan because it just doesn't make any economic sense to build it.

Jones also recycles the trope that the CIA trained and funded the "Arab Afghans" to the tune of $800 million during the 1980s war against the Soviet Union, when, in fact, as journalist Steve Coll has shown in *Ghost Wars*, his Pulitzer Prize–winning account of American involvement in Afghanistan, there is no evidence that the agency had any direct dealings with Osama bin Laden and his crew of foreign fighters.

Where *Kabul in Winter* begins to take off is in Jones's devastating critique of American aid to Afghanistan, which is consumed all too often by foreigners, evident in the fleets of Land Rovers and Toyota Land Cruisers that choke Kabul's smog-filled streets. Jones wryly observes: "Afghanistan, we learned from TV, had been 'rebuilt' thanks to millions of dollars of international aid pouring into the country. Where was it?" In a conversation with an American education expert Jones receives a depressing answer to that question. The expert explains that 80 to 90 percent of American aid goes to US contractors to cover overhead for back offices in the States as well as housing and office space in Kabul, and perks such as drivers, R and R, imported food, furniture and alcohol.

Jones points out that in contrast to countries like Sweden, which allocates only 4 percent of its aid costs to "technical assistance" that goes back home to pay Swedes, "eighty-six cents of every dollar of American aid is phantom aid" that will line American pockets rather than go directly to Afghans. According to Jones, only France has a worse record in this area.

The heart of Jones's book is her deeply reported description of her work trying to improve conditions for women prisoners and female hospital patients in Kabul. Dickensian is far too mild an adjective to describe the conditions that she encounters:

> In the dirty emergency room...lies a young girl. Perhaps sixteen.... The head nurse stands at the foot of the bed and outlines the case dispassionately, as if the patient were not there. This girl was made to marry an old man, she says. Then he accused her of adultery because a friend of his saw her talking to a boy in the street; he told her to return to her father's house. She hadn't wanted to marry this husband, but to go back was to spread shame on her family, like a stain. She was afraid her father would kill her to wash it away. In this crisis, she went for advice to her neighbor, who said: Why don't you burn yourself? So she did. She drenched her body in diesel fuel and set herself alight. The flames burned 90 percent of her skin and spared only her head, which lies now on a tear-drenched pillow in a kind of separate agony of consciousness and pain.

Jones explains that Afghan customary law, which treats women as property, underlies the self-immolations and honor killings: "Afghans themselves have a saying that names the three sources of social discord as 'zan, zar, zamin'—women, gold and land. When Afghans name threats to social order, they name women first." Afghan customary law is not about justice as it is understood in the West but about the restoration of social order, an order that is entirely dominated by men. And so, in disputes about family honor involving women, it is invariably a woman who ends up paying the price of restoring the social order either by being killed or committing suicide. In the western city of Herat, for instance, there were an estimated 190 self-immolations in 2003.

Herat is where Rory Stewart began his walk across Afghanistan, a country that is "an unpredictable composite of etiquette, humor, and extreme brutality." Any British writer who writes about walking in Afghanistan does so in the shadow of the great British travel writer Eric Newby, who died in October and whose 1958 book *A Short Walk in the Hindu Kush* is a minor comic masterpiece, the foreword of which was written by Evelyn Waugh. *A Short Walk* describes how Newby, who toiled unhappily at a fashion house in London, left for Afghanistan to climb a 20,000-foot mountain in Nuristan after training for only four days by climbing rocks in Wales. Suffice to say that many things went wrong during his expedition.

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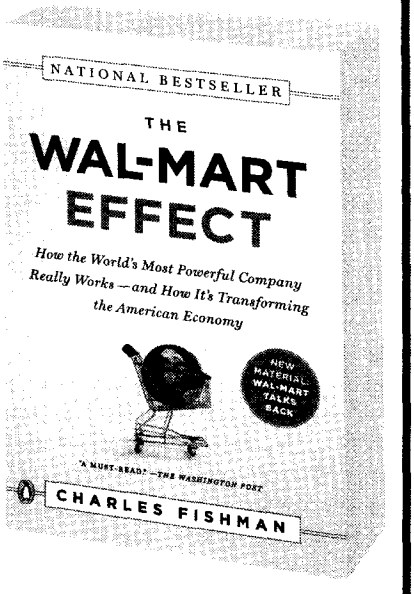
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Five decades later Stewart, a worthy successor to Newby, decided to walk across Afghanistan as the Taliban were falling during the winter of 2001. He chose to take a route across central Afghanistan, a region so inhospitable to outsiders, isolated and impassable that only one imperial power in history, the Ghorids in the twelfth century, seems to have bothered to secure the region. (At one point on his trip Stewart even stumbles across the remains of the lost Ghorid highland capital, the Turquoise Mountain, which was being systematically looted by locals.) Stewart takes a "long walk" in the Hindu Kush so fraught with danger that at one point he bumps into a contingent of British Special Forces who call him a "fucking nutter." Stewart, correctly, understands this to be their highest form of praise.

Although Stewart's beautifully written book is in a lighter vein than those of Chayes and Jones, underlying his picaresque stories of adventure on the road is a critical point that is often overlooked by Westerners with dreams of transforming Afghanistan into a place where women enjoy equal rights, "capacity building" creates viable stable government institutions and the power of warlords crumbles with the spread of "civil society." Such dreams rarely survive contact with the religiously conservative, tribal, rural, not infrequently xenophobic societies where most Afghans live.

Stewart, a former British diplomat who served as deputy governor of a southern province of Iraq following the US-led invasion of the country, is skeptical of Western efforts to transform countries like Afghanistan into societies in our own image, a principle espoused by neoconservatives and liberal internationalists alike:

> Most of the policy makers knew next to nothing about the villages where 90 per cent of the Afghan population lived. They came from postmodern, secular, globalized states with liberal traditions in law and government. It was natural for them to initiate projects on urban design, women's rights...and to speak of a people "who desire peace at any cost and understand the need for a centralized multi-ethnic government." But what did they understand of the thought processes of Seyyed Kerbalahi's wife, who had not moved five kilometers from her home in forty years. Or Dr. Habibullah, the vet, who carried an automatic weapon in the way they carried briefcases?

This is a pessimistic view of what the West can achieve in Afghanistan (not to mention Iraq), but it's a view that is informed by Stewart's erudite knowledge of Afghan history and his extensive travels in the country, and by what has actually taken place in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world; the government barely functions, local warlords have the run of the place and much of the country is racked by violence. The best that can be said of Afghanistan is: At least it's not as bad as Iraq. And even that could change.

The United States' experience in both countries calls to mind Kant's observation: "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made." Perhaps in coming years we will learn a little humility and patience about the efficacy of the wholesale export of Western democratic values and institutions into countries with very different social mores and political structures. Those Western exports have now beached on the shoals of reality from the Tigris to the Kabul River. ■

A View From the Bridge

MELANIE REHAK

COMPLETE POEMS & SELECTED LETTERS.
By Hart Crane. Library of America. 849 pp. $40.

"At times dear Gorham, I feel an enormous power in me—that seems almost supernatural," Hart Crane wrote to his friend Gorham Munson in 1922. America was under the spell of Modernism, and Crane was on the cusp of his twenty-third birthday, but he had been sure since the age of 17 that he was destined for literary greatness. He was falling short of it, he believed, because of circumstance rather than his own limitations. "If this power is not too dissipated in aggravation and discouragement I may amount to something sometime," he continued. The modern condition was a big part of his problem ("If only America were half as worthy today to be spoken of as Whitman spoke of it fifty years ago there might be something for one to say," he wrote to another friend). Equally frustrating for Crane, however, was the necessity of earning a living. He was constitutionally incapable of holding down a job, in large measure because he felt he shouldn't be required to, and as a result was always short of funds. Though he worked off and on in advertising while he was in New York, and at a few dreadful posts at his father's candy company when he was forced to return home, completely broke, to Ohio, most often he was content to borrow as much as he could from friends and family, shuttling between numerous New York City apartments, his native Midwest and various people's country houses. A stint at his grandmother's decrepit estate off the coast of Cuba, where he sought but never found peace, filled out the spring of 1926.

All of this conspired to make Crane, already at odds with the world thanks to his often frightening proclivity for excess and his homosexuality, feel even more of an outsider—and an exhausted one at that. As he explained to his mother, he was constantly "moving around from one place to another, clothes here, there and everywhere and not knowing where the next meal was coming from." But there was another, equally large—if not larger—problem standing between Hart Crane and his best work, though he was not willing to admit it. "I can say this now with perfect equanimity," he wrote to Munson, referring to his proclamations of greatness and despair, "because I am notoriously drunk..."

For if Crane was one of America's greatest poets—and his inclusion in the Library of America pronounces, once and for all, that he was—he was also one of America's most infamous imbibers. He believed drinking illuminated the darkest corners of his imagination—as he wrote in "The Wine Menagerie," "Invariably when wine redeems the sight...A leopard ranging always in the brow/Asserts a vision in the slumbering gaze." He often sat down to work when he was drunk, and once confessed to Alfred Stieglitz, "I nearly go mad with the intense but always misty realization of what *can* be done if potentialities are fully freed, re-

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leased." Indeed, his plans were nothing if not grandiose. "Very roughly, it concerns a mystical synthesis of 'America,'" he said of the epic poem that he planned to write about the formation of the United States, "The Bridge," which became his masterpiece and best-known work. "History and fact, location, etc. all have to be transfigured into abstract form that would almost function independently of its subject matter. The initial impulses of 'our people' will have to be gathered up toward the climax of the bridge..."

With a design as lofty as that, it's perhaps no wonder that the poem, which was published in 1930 as a book resplendent with Walker Evans's photographs of the Brooklyn Bridge, is a spectacular, though inarguably important, failure. Much of it crumbles under the weight of history, which Crane doesn't manage to bring to life—the clash between Native Americans and New Americans, the drama of the Gold Rush—and the language seems to wind around itself so completely at certain points that it's entirely choked off from meaning. This was a problem he had encountered before. After he submitted a poem to Marianne Moore's *Dial* magazine in 1925, she wrote back to him rejecting it: "We could not but be moved, as you must know, by the rich imagination and sensibility in your poem, Passage. Its multiform content accounts, I suppose, for what seems to us a lack of simplicity and cumulative force. We are sorry to return it." Though Crane was angry at Moore, he was not entirely unaware of his weaknesses. Writing to Munson about "The Bridge" in 1926, he noted that "however bad this work may be, it ought to be hugely and unforgivably, distinguishedly bad. In a way it's a test of materials as much as a test of one's imagination."

In spite of his depressive temperament, Crane was an enthusiast, and as such was explicitly against the pessimism that defined his era and especially its poetry. "Is this acceptable or not as the poetic determinism of our age?!" he asked Munson about the final stanza of T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "This is the way the world ends/Not with a bang but a whimper." "I, of course, can say no, to myself, and believe it." Though he admired Eliot's skill, Crane utterly refused to bow down to fashionable skepticism, and instead turned backward to find inspiration, telling the critic and poet Louis Untermeyer, who had written about Crane in *The New Republic*, "It has been my conviction, based on personal experience (whether my poems prove it or not) that ecstasy and beauty are as possible to the active imagination now as ever. (What did Blake have from 'the outside' to excite him?)"

Born in 1899 with, as he quipped in a letter to the critic Allen Tate, "a little toe-nail in the last century," Crane was never quite comfortable in his own time. His delight in working on "The Bridge" came, in large part, from his rediscovery of his country's beginnings. "I have never been able to live *completely* in my work before," he wrote to the novelist and critic Waldo Frank in 1926. "To handle the beautiful skeins of this myth of America—to realize suddenly, as I seem to, how much of the past is living under only slightly altered forms, even in machinery and such-like, is extremely exciting."

His thrill shows all over his most ambitious work, despite its flaws. Where it is good, it is truly awe-inspiring, and once read, is burned into the mind forever. The entire "Proem" (as he called it) of the book is a gorgeous, wild ride, a glittering paean to his object of desire. "O harp and altar, of the fury fused," he writes of his beloved bridge:

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(How could mere toil align thy choiring
strings!)
Terrific threshold of the prophet's
pledge,
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—

Again the traffic lights that skim thy
swift
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh
of stars,
Beading thy path—condense eternity:
And we have seen night lifted in thine
arms.

But Crane was able to manage such flights only when his personal life was steady, something that more often than not eluded him, thanks to his parents' fractured relationships to each other and to their son. As late as 1922, he confided to a friend that he was "quite disrupted. Family affairs and 'fusses' have been my destruction since I was eight years old when my father and mother began to quarrel. That phase only ended recently, and the slightest disturbance now tends to recall with consummate force all the past and its horrid memories." Even after Grace and C.A. Crane finally split in 1917, there was no peace for their offspring. Crane, never able to put up his defenses against an unhealthy emotional bond, became his mother's proxy husband (it was she who suggested he drop his given name of Harold for Hart, his middle and her maiden name) as well as her advocate vis-à-vis his father. "Now for a winter coat and hat you are owing Mother fifty-one dollars. And the last two months rent on the apartment, eighty-dollars, you also owe her," he wrote to his father after the divorce was finalized and he, his mother and grandmother had decamped to New York. His time was taken up with these petty matters and with larger emotional negotiations as well, for although he was angry at his father, he was as desperate for his approval as he was for his money. Long after Grace had remarried, he was still begging to be understood by C.A. "Can't you rub some of the prejudice from your eyes, and see me a little clearer? It will honestly hurt me to receive help from you unless I can believe that a little of your father's pride and heart is in it."

When Crane's family wasn't bringing him to the brink of despair, his love affairs were. Nevertheless, he needed them to feel alive and to bring him to the extremes he relished even as they destroyed him. "I am entirely engrossed in personal erotic experience lately," he wrote to Munson in 1921 about his new fling with a truck driver who was also working at his father's warehouse in Cleveland. "O if you had ever seen the very Soul of Pierrot...you would at least admire. Never, though, has such beauty and happy-pain been given me before." Like all of his passions, Crane's romances inspired poetry. His Pierrot, for example, found his way into "Praise for an Urn," published in his first book, *White Buildings* (1926). The poem was a eulogy for a friend who had been killed in a car accident, but Crane simply transposed his emotions to fit the occasion, writing of his lost friend's "kind and northern face/That mingled in such exile guise/The everlasting eyes of Pierrot/And, of Gargantua, the laughter."

On other occasions, Crane was more forthcoming about his desires, though he was careful never to indicate that they were directed at men. "Legend," also published in *White Buildings*, is a defiant hymn to lust, but it never makes the object of its fierce emotions apparent. "I am not ready for repentance," he writes, "Nor to match regrets. For the moth/Bends no more than the still/Imploring flame. And tremorous/In the white falling flakes/Kisses are,—/The only worth all granting."

"Legend" emerged in 1924, in the middle of what would be a long, intermittent love affair with Emil Opffer, a merchant marine and the son of Crane's landlord at 110 Columbia Heights in Brooklyn. Opffer also inspired a sequence of love poems called "Voyages," which number among Crane's best work. He writes of the ocean, where he imagined Opffer on his travels, with a rare, muscular beauty:

Light wrestling there incessantly with
light,
Star kissing star through wave on wave
unto
Your body rocking!
and where death, if
shed,
Presumes no carnage, but this single
change,—
Upon the steep floor flung from dawn
to dawn
The silken skilled transmemberment
of song;

Permit me voyage, love, into your
hands...

In section four of the poem, he writes of Opffer's "Blue latitudes and levels of your eyes," and then, as if worried he's given too much away, finishes with an obvious image of heterosexual love, "In this expectant, still exclaim receive/The secret oar and petals of all love."

The apartment at 110 Columbia Heights brought Crane more than just the most important relationship of his short life, however. It was in this building that he was able to gorge himself on the view of the bridge he loved so much, and its shape on the horizon became inextricably bound to his affair with Opffer. In a letter to Waldo Frank, Crane confessed to "the ecstasy of walking hand in hand across the most beautiful bridge of the world, the cables enclosing us and pulling us upward in such a dance as I have never walked and never can walk with another." Unable or just unwilling to distinguish between things and people he loved, Crane muddled all of his grand passions together until they became his religion. Upon falling head first into his affair with the Cleveland truck driver, he wrote to a friend, "I believe in, or have found God again." Of the Brooklyn Bridge he wrote, "Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend/And of the curveship lend a myth to God." Upon meeting Opffer, he declared he had "seen the Word made Flesh."

In the last months of his life, just before he committed suicide at the age of 32 by jumping over the railing of a ship sailing from Mexico to New York (he had gone there on a Guggenheim Fellowship), Crane performed one last act of transposition by falling in love with a woman, Peggy Cowley, who had gone to Mexico to get a divorce from her literary critic husband, Malcolm. He was as surprised as anyone, and yet he never once thought to shy away from this new form of love. "I'm in such a hectic rush this morning that I can't do more than remind you that you already know the depth of my love for you," he wrote her soon after their romance began. The whole thing was "psychologically so strange and new a meditation to me...almost like sheer delirium." For Crane, this was the only way to live. Though he had found his heart in Brooklyn, he left New York behind because it was old territory, used up. Still, he knew the power of that place, and the record he left of it has long given his readers precisely what the bridge gave him.

"That window is where I would be most remembered of all: the ships, the harbor, and the skyline of Manhattan, midnight, morning or evening,—rain, snow or sun, it is everything from mountains to the walls of Jerusalem and Nineveh," he wrote Waldo Frank in 1924. "I believe I am a little changed—not essentially, but changed and transubstantiated as anyone is who has asked a question and been answered." ■

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ART

A Painter of Our Time

BARRY SCHWABSKY

DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ

When Italian Baroque artist Luca Giordano declared *Las Meninas* "the theology of painting" in 1692, he was paying an extravagant compliment, "by which he meant to convey," as Giordano's friend and Velázquez's biographer Antonio Palomino put it, "that just as theology is superior to all other branches of knowledge, so is this picture the greatest example of painting." But just as a passage from Pierre Menard's *Don Quixote* is, according to Jorge Luis Borges, "almost infinitely richer" than the original by Cervantes, so this phrase becomes infinitely richer if we imagine it being pronounced by a later admirer like Édouard Manet, who certainly did consider Velázquez the greatest of all painters. A visit to the exhibition of the Spanish master's work at the National Gallery in London, on view through January 21, makes it hard

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Diego Velázquez, *Joseph's Bloody Coat Brought to Jacob*, 1630, Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Patrimonio Nacional inv. 10014694

to disagree with Manet, even despite a big handicap: Of necessity, the show lacks many of the artist's most celebrated works—including *Las Meninas*. Most remain at home in Madrid, as the great portrait of Pope Innocent X does in Rome. Still, the Prado, along with other institutions and a few very fortunate private collections, has been generous with its loans, and since London already domiciles the largest concentration of Velázquez's works outside Spain, the National Gallery has been able to round up forty-six paintings, about a third of the surviving *oeuvre*, to give a powerful précis of this astonishing career.

What an artist like Manet rather than Giordano could have understood by "the theology of painting," the more profound force of this statement, emerges when one contemplates the obvious truth that in the seventeenth century, unlike the nineteenth, the primary subject matter of painting was indeed theology. Painted images had their highest import in the service of religion; they were devotional and didactic in purpose. But there's a great difference between the painting of theology and the theology of painting. Velázquez offers a glimpse of a strange and haunting idea, one that should have been nearly unthinkable in his own time—that painting could have what we might today call spiritual significance, not because of its exalted subject matter but, somehow, in itself; that painting, through the intensity of its realization, could transmute its subject into something holy.

As odd as this fateful idea would have seemed to Velázquez's contemporaries (other than Rembrandt), as peculiar as it probably seemed to him even as he entertained it, it's not one that was ever likely to have had many adherents. Manet, worldly man that he was, would have been leery of putting it so bluntly. Today, most painters would probably find it embarrassing. And yet the relentless urge in modern art to incorporate the most humble and abject aspects of human existence, the most trivial and insignificant objects, surely finds one of its roots here. Duchamp's ready-mades may amount to a kind of sophisticated joke about this idea, but it's a dead-serious joke, all the more so for his radical insistence on choice—on being able to see something in a certain way—as a sufficient form of realization. In this sense all the Duchampian postmodernists, no less than their Modernist granddads, are children of Velázquez; that's why, although Duchamp's melancholy *aperçu* that art only stays art for fifty years before declining into art history is generally

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true, certain paintings by Velázquez strike us as powerfully contemporary.

The first of this exhibition's four rooms is devoted to Velázquez's early days in Seville, when he emerged from the informal academy of a prominent local artist who was richer in erudition than in talent, and who was soon to be his father-in-law. But Velázquez must have had more in mind than taking over the family business even as an 18-year-old earning his license, in 1617, as a "master painter of religious images, and in oils and everything related." Awkward and disjointed as his first independent paintings can be (*Three Musicians* might be a puzzle put together from unmatched pieces), they possess an eerie power. Caravaggism had swept through Europe, and while Velázquez probably never saw an original work by Caravaggio until years later, his followers' efforts would have been sufficient to suggest to the ambitious young painter that a way forward might pass through the Italian master's dramatic naturalism.

Although he was soon painting religious subjects and portraits as well, Velázquez first established himself as a specialist in what were called *bodegones*, scenes of everyday life set in kitchens or taverns, and in which still-life elements were prominent. (Later on, the term came to refer specifically to still life, but Velázquez never painted a pure still life.) But these are not typical lowlife scenes, such as might be found in Dutch genre painting. There is an uncanny gravity to them, as if there were something more in these people than they might ever know. An old woman cooking eggs looks off into some unspecific distance as if receiving a prophecy. A massive old man selling drinks of water looks like a pope in rags. A maid bends over the crockery on a table looking at it as intently as if it were a supernatural apparition.

Later on, of course, Velázquez would paint popes and prophetesses, and he would see more in them, too, than they could ever know. In fact, it's extraordinary how often the teenaged Velázquez reached for effects whose true weight he would only be able to show forty years later, when he'd reached the height of his powers. If one misses *Las Meninas* here, it's not only in its own right as an étude in transcendental technique, to borrow Liszt's phrase, but as a fulfillment of what the painter was more crudely aiming at in his first experiments with scenes-within-the-scene, in *Kitchen Scene With Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1618) and *Kitchen Scene With Christ at Emmaus*, from around the same year. It may be that, as Xavier Bray puts it in the exhibition catalogue, "such pictures helped the faithful to integrate the world of work with that of the spirit," but in the absence of any obvious allegorical connection between the foreground kitchen scenes and the dreamily sketchy biblical episodes in the distance, one feels rather that the paintings embody a reproach against an absence of integration between daily life and sacred history.

In 1623, thanks in part to his father-in-law's connections among the Sevillians at the royal court in Madrid, Velázquez was appointed painter to Philip IV—a mediocre king but a remarkable connoisseur. Now the painter of *bodegones* became a full-time portraitist. Access to the royal collection gave him a new intimacy with sixteenth-century Venetian art, especially that of Titian. The paintings here from the early years in Madrid betray an uneasy experimentation with a variety of styles—a portrait from 1624 of the Count-Duke of Olivares, if it really is by Velázquez, seems to look back to the Mannerism of the late sixteenth century, for instance—but two events helped solidify Velázquez's mastery. First, the arrival of Rubens in Madrid in 1628, not as a painter but as a diplomat; he snubbed the other Madrid court painters for the duffers they were but spent much time with Velázquez, praising, in Palomino's words, the "quality and simplicity" of his style. Rubens's manner had little direct influence on that of his Spanish colleague, but the Flemish painter's immense abilities, not to mention his standing as an intellectual and man of the world, opened new horizons. So did Velázquez's first trip to Italy a year later. Not only could he gain new insight into his beloved Venetians, but he could take the measure of established contemporaries like Poussin, Guercino and his countryman Ribera, now established in Naples.

A pair of remarkable history paintings done in Rome around 1630 shows just how far the trip to Italy had taken him. While Velázquez had always been trying to use many different sorts of painterly effects in a single work, the results had always shown a certain disjointedness. In *Joseph's Bloody Coat Brought to Jacob* the transition from the play of light and the sculptural solidity of the figures on the left, three of the sons who've sold their brother into Egyptian slavery, to the shadowy half-tones that becloud the deceived father on the right is achieved with great suavity. And his employment of rhetorical gesture and facial

Two Hayings

My grandfather and I, with Riley the horse,
took four days to hay the acres of grass
from the fields on both sides of the house.
After Riley pulled the mowing machine
all morning, he drank a bucket of water,
then pulled a horserake and turned the hay
to dry in the sun, then heaped it together.
With a scythe I trimmed the uncut hay
around boulders and trees, by stone walls,
and raked every blade to one of Riley's piles.
My grandfather pitched it up on the rack
where I climbed to load it, fitting forkfuls
in place. We left behind us hayfields
as neat as lawns.

Sixty-odd years later,
a farmer's machines take alfalfa down
in an afternoon. Next morning, an engine
with huge claws grapples round green bales
onto trucks, leaving loose hay scattered
and grasses waving at the field's margin.
From the porch where I rock with my book,
I marvel at acceleration and dishevelment.

Donald Hall

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expression throws down the gauntlet to his Roman colleagues, as if to say, "See how your technique shows feigned emotion more easily than the real thing." Such posturing had its uses but would play little part in the Spaniard's mature work, which is emotionally restrained rather than demonstrative. And just to prove the point, what almost amounts to a companion piece, *Apollo at the Forge of Vulcan*, shows a dramatic moment of exposure rather than deception—the sun god is breaking the news that Vulcan's wife, Venus, has been dallying with Mars—but entirely without those conventional gestures that lend themselves to insincerity. In both paintings the naturalism Velázquez had practiced a decade before is still at work but now with a sort of classicism subtly subsumed. Part of the paintings' effectiveness lies in the ordinariness of the models; Vulcan and his helpers look like real workmen, though they lack the grime that Caravaggio might have included, yet as Dawson Carr remarks in the catalogue, their bodies also reflect the artist's study of classical sculpture. Reality and the ideal, contingent and eternal fuse as they could not do earlier.

Velázquez returned to Madrid in 1631, and except for a second journey to Italy in 1649–51, he remained at court the rest of his life, acquiring new privileges and responsibilities all the while—most notably, becoming the curator of Philip's ever-expanding art collection. Had he been a less canny courtier we might now possess more of his paintings. Much of the rest of the exhibition consists of portraits, both formal and informal. It's important to keep in mind that both sorts were part of the job—that the depiction of a court dwarf like Francisco Lezcano, mid-1640s, which probably hung along with several similar works in the Torre de la Parada, a sort of royal hunting lodge, was as much of a duty as the celebration of the King himself, or of his young wife Queen Mariana of Austria as a victim of extreme fashion. Envious competitors among the painters at court made portraiture a reproach; Velázquez, they whispered, only knew how to paint heads. The implication was that his was a servile and literal-minded art able only to reproduce nature, not an exercise of the intellect. Or as we would put it today, insufficiently conceptual. Velázquez is said to have replied: "They favor me greatly, for I do not know that there is anyone who can paint a head."

Now, the old biographies are full of conventional praise and recycled anecdotes—when Palomino, writing sixty years after the artist's death, reports that King Philip mistook one of those painted heads for a real courtier, saying, "What, are you still here?" we dismiss it as a cliché. But in the oblique and paradoxical remark "I do not know that there is anyone who can paint a head," we hear a living voice, one imbued, moreover, with that "phlegmatic temperament" that the monarch himself came to rue in his favorite painter. All the more telling, then, that this voice suddenly emerging from the stately hum of the document is one we are tempted to call modern. Isn't it strange that in the seventeenth century, we are already hearing of the impossibility of painting, the absurdity of our desire to represent, and precisely from one who had devoted his life to just that? With this remark we find ourselves approaching the world, still unthinkable to Velázquez and his colleagues, in which Cézanne would devote a hundred sittings to a portrait that no one would ever mistake for the person it represents; "If a head interests me, I make it too large," Cézanne is said to have apologized. Or the world in which Giacometti could muse, "If I could just do a head, one head, just once, then maybe I'd have a chance of doing the rest, a landscape, a still life. But it's impossible." And yet between the Spaniard's cool irony and the Modernists' anxiety lies a world of difference.

Contemporary artists who are far indeed from anything resembling the Modernism of Cézanne or Giacometti still feel that their undertaking is problematic or self-contradictory in this way. American painter Carroll Dunham recently put it quite simply: "I'm only interested in painting that's aware of its own dilemma." For Velázquez, the dilemma was already there, but how many artists have even been able to derive so much concentrated energy from their dilemmas? If anything is missing from this exhibition, it's a sense of just how restlessly experimental Velázquez remained all his life. It's astonishing how many "exceptions" there are in this *oeuvre*—paintings of a sort one would never have expected. Among them is a glory of the National Gallery's own collection, *The Toilet of Venus* (1647–51), better known as the Rokeby Venus, part of the exhibition's final section, "Portraying the Ancients." For one thing, it's the artist's only female nude, a subject Spanish painters of this period were not expected to handle. With an odd sort of hypocrisy, such things were acceptable but only as Italian or Flemish imports; thus was the tension between ecclesiastical condemnation and aristocratic delectation defused. More than that, the goddess's pose is entirely original, as is the peculiar mixture of exposure and mystery that results from

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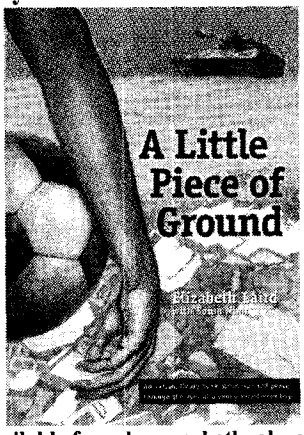

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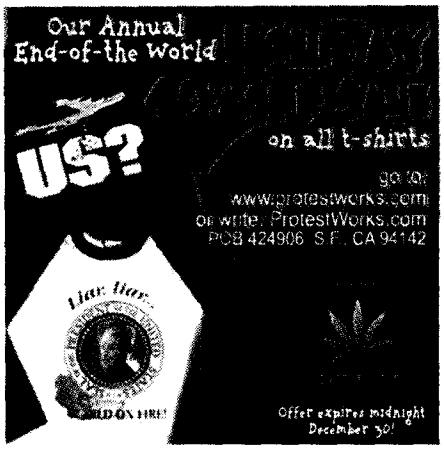

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it. The body shown so beguilingly from behind holds an undeniable sensual realism, though understated by the standards of a Titian or a Rubens, but the face glimpsed so darkly in the mirror suggests an even more powerful unknowability. The consummate art, according to Velázquez, is not the one that brings reality close to us as an object of voyeuristic inspection but rather the one that reminds us of our difficulty in grasping it at all.

Although painted a decade earlier than the Venus, Velázquez's disenchanted *Mars* (circa 1638) might well represent her implicit onlooker. He is nearly nude himself and, though he faces the viewer, his countenance too is half hidden, shadowed by the helmet that sits on his head so incongruously without the rest of his armor. And yet his eyes pierce the obscurity with their melancholy. Pensive, chin on hand—could this Mars have been a source for Rodin's *Thinker*?—he sits on the edge of a disheveled bed, but the tryst has clearly not been a success. Sensuality is seductive but fleeting. Velázquez's technique was, of course, ideally suited to conveying this sense of transience. Working, in his later years, with an astonishing economy of means, he was able to conjure a sense of the most concrete reality with a few seemingly random swipes of the brush, and yet the illusion dissolves as soon as one draws near. Maybe Luca Giordano was wrong after all. If there's a theology here, it's a negative one. In Velázquez's early years, the holy may have revealed itself in everyday reality, but once he'd learned to see reality as an illusion, where did that leave the holy he'd found in it? He must have been glad not to have had to paint religious subjects any more in the last decades of his life. ■

FILMS

Within the Context of No Context

STUART KLAWANS

BLOOD DIAMOND • INLAND EMPIRE • THE GOOD GERMAN • THE HISTORY BOYS

Down to hell Ed Zwick tumbles, over his good intentions. The director of *Glory* and *The Last Samurai* has set out willingly for the inferno of 1990s Sierra Leone, where drug-addled child conscripts carried out massacres for a rebel army, using guns bought through the diamond trade. His golden intention: to stir the conscience of moviegoers in the North so they will seek to end such horrors. When Americans go out for a date on Friday night, when they seek holiday recreation, Zwick will appall them with scenes they previously refused to watch on the 11 o'clock news. All he will ask, by way of thanks, is an Oscar or two.

In this way, Zwick has arrived at a substitute hell: the cinematic Styx titled *Blood Diamond*.

It is long (or, if you prefer, epic), expensively expansive, marvelous to look at (no matter how awful its events) and incorrigibly expository. Considering how much information Charles Leavitt's screenplay dumps into your ears, you might at least expect to leave the theater with a focused analysis. But given the number of clichés Zwick has lavished on the subject, you are more likely to lose track of the argument, so that you'll go away with nothing in mind but triumph and tragedy. The triumph belongs to thrice-noble Solomon Vandy (Djimon Hounsou), who starts out as a poor fisherman but by the end has a briefcase full of cash, a handsome new suit and lip service from a chamber of white diplomats. (So much for the suffering of Africa's people.) The tragedy is that of Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly), a conspicuously hot globetrotting correspondent for *The Nation*, or some such magazine. By the end, this unlikely figure has filed the biggest story of her career, but at what cost? Maddy will never again ride up and down on mercenary-smuggler Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio)—so tanned, so sweaty, so *interesting*.

Don't get me wrong: If any onscreen love interest would be worth Jennifer Connelly's attention, it would be Leo, who

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comes to the role pumped and gives good dialect, too. But why (apart from the obvious reason) should *Blood Diamond* waste so much time building sexual tension between him and Connelly? With so many chases to cut to, why don't they? Why, as Connelly waits for the inevitable, must she take seriously a role that Karen Allen in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* played for laughs? And speaking of those chases: How do the stars of *Blood Diamond* make so many improbable escapes from hails of bullets? You'd think the movie ought to be called *Near-Death Experience.*

"I know people who say there is something wrong inside our black skins," Hounsou tells DiCaprio at a meditative moment between machine-gun bursts, "and we were better off when the white man ruled." For all of Zwick's good intentions, I see nothing in *Blood Diamond* to contradict this foul opinion. With exceptions that are painfully few (and painfully stilted), the film's black Africans come booming their blood-lust song straight out of Vachel Lindsay's "The Congo." The white mercenary-smuggler, by contrast, is at heart a soulful fellow, trembling for Connelly's redemptive touch. ("An entire country made homeless," she sighs to him, with her right breast fetchingly displayed.) Anyhow, the white man still seems to rule, since the solution to Africa's problems, evidently, is for several of the species to pass a resolution at a G-8 conference.

But it's up to you to make that resolution binding! As a title explains at the end of *Blood Diamond*, power ultimately rests in the hands of the consumer. So next time you splurge at Tiffany, *Nation* reader, demand conflict-free sparklers, lest you add to Djimon Hounsou's troubles. Though maybe you *should* add to them, so he can get a second briefcase full of cash. Hell, I'm not sure what to do for the guy.

Some people admire David Lynch because he does not just use the conventions and atmosphere of "the movies" but revels in them, and without any burden of Zwicklike social purpose—in fact, without discernible purpose at all. Though certain of his fans may stare mistakenly at his narrative threads, hoping for a pattern to emerge, wiser moviegoers know that Lynch just wants to pull the rug out from under them. Then he slips it back under their feet so he can pull it again.

So it goes with *Inland Empire*, one of the longest and most self-involved works in the Lynch canon: a film (video, actually) that purports to play the old game of trapping an actress within the movie she's making so that she loses herself in the maze of role and identity, illusion and reality. Having set up this game, *Inland Empire* also mocks it, making cheesy, portentous use of images like the Hollywood sign and the Walk of Fame. Folderol happens (generally involving the actress being abused, menaced, bewildered, abased); a plot begins to suggest itself; and then, just as intelligibility threatens, the whole thing collapses back into folderol. Some people call this the free play of signifiers. I say it's a prison-house of futility.

Laura Dern stars as the movie actress (maybe) who is or is not making a picture titled *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. At one point, this project is said to be the remake of an unfinished, accursed German film that was based on a Polish gypsy folk tale. I would like to see that movie. What I got instead, for three hours, was a catalogue of vintage David Lynch motifs, unified only by the director's fascination with Laura Dern's mouth.

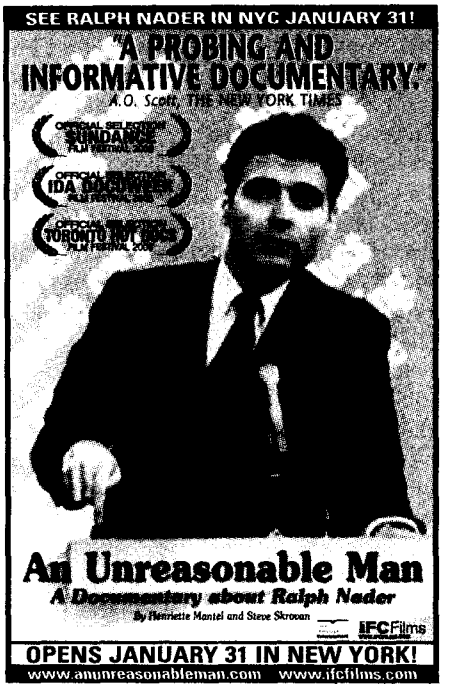
Inland Empire is about nothing but that. Lynch shoots upward at Dern in close-up, to make her mouth loom in the frame. He floods the screen with light so her face washes out except for the lipstick. He plants a big fake bruise on her chin, right where it will draw attention to the jut of her lower lip. He directs her to breathe orally, so you can see her teeth framed by a gently curved, vertical box. Her tremulous orifice, red-bordered, white-lined, soft and pliant at the center of its bow, hard and linear at the edges—this fleshy abyss that nervously sneers and stammers—seems to speak and act on its own, since it is attached not to a character but to a mere notion. It is more than a synecdoche, more than a fetish. The mouth of Laura Dern is the sole subject and protagonist of *Inland Empire*.

Unless, of course, you count the family of giant, bourgeois rabbits.

With apologies to Steven Soderbergh, who has never wanted to play Baby Bear to anyone's Papa and Mama, I will say that coincidence has made him do just that, now that he shares the release calendar with Lynch and Zwick. His new film, *The Good German*, is like *Inland Empire* in being a self-conscious parade of old movie tropes. It is like *Blood Diamond* in having a movielike fable to tell: a moral tale about war and corruption (with a little sex). Not too hot and not too cold: In its fusion of style and substance, Soderbergh's film goes down just right.

But how important is that?

In any month but December, you might not ask, because you could enjoy *The Good*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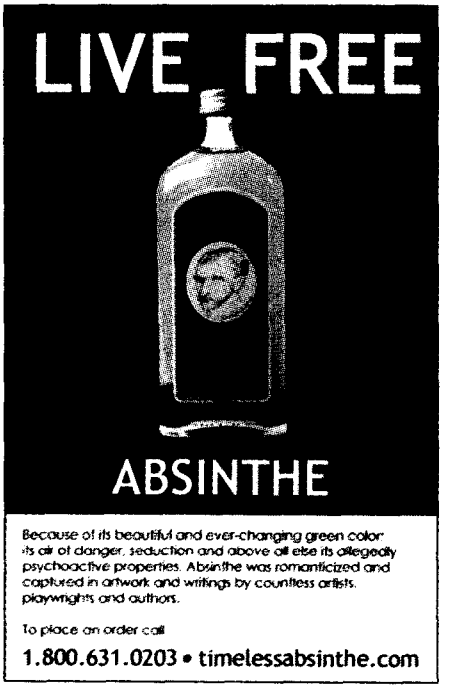
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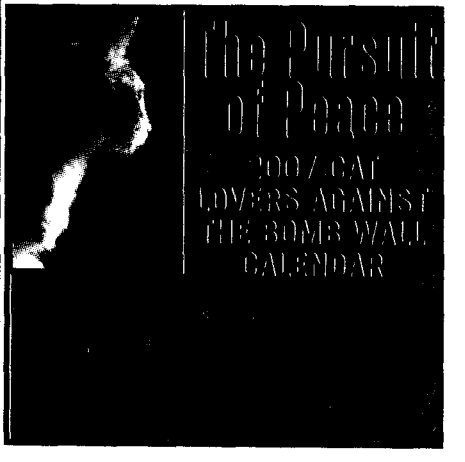

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German simply as a *jeu d'esprit*. It is a slightly exaggerated re-creation of a 1940s studio-made film, shot on soundstages and back lots using old-fashioned lenses and boom mikes, camera tracks and rear projection. The image is black and white; the lighting, chiaroscuro; the performance style, extroverted; the musical score, through-composed. I get the feeling that Soderbergh had been nursing a directorial urge, a desire to make his own version of *Casablanca* or *The Third Man*, and found a narrative appropriate to that purpose in a recent novel by Joseph Kanon: a book that is no better (and no worse) than the average literary fodder for 1940s movies, and that has the advantage of being set in the ruins of Berlin, after the Allied victory but before the Japanese surrender.

Here, then, are the world-weary not-so-wise guy (George Clooney), the damaged dame out of the past (Cate Blanchett), the sharp operator (Tobey Maguire), the savvy foreign officer (Ravil Isyanov) and even the sidekick bartender (Tony Curran), all caught up in a murder mystery, a political intrigue, a romance gone bad. If you want to take pleasure in these characters as stock figures, stylishly realized, then there's much to like in *The Good German*, from Blanchett's throaty languor (as she knowingly evokes Marlene Dietrich) and Clooney's haplessness (so different from his usual swagger) to the fleet pace of Paul Attanasio's screenplay, which allows these people to figure one another out just a beat before you manage to.

But *The Good German* has in fact come out in December, when producers and distributors try to appeal to Oscar voters, or at least grown-ups; and this context creates problems. It might remind you that elements of this story—the Holocaust, say—are more than the occasion for a *jeu d'esprit*. You may notice that Soderbergh, for all his intelligence, hasn't gotten beneath the surface of his stock figures, into the lived experience that might underlie them. And when you realize that the intimate drama of *The Good German* has no necessary connection with its world-historical themes, you may feel as if you've slipped back into *Blood Diamond*, with a black-and-white Leo and Jennifer.

I come at last to a holiday release that has no cinema—*The History Boys*—and discover it's the most satisfying of the present lot. About Nicholas Hytner's direction, I can say only that it keeps the actors in the frame and misuses just one of them. (Clive Merrison is the victim, in the role of a comical headmaster. He's encouraged to be such a gargoyle that the movie could turn to stone around him.) Whatever style you find in *The History Boys* comes solely from screenwriter Alan Bennett (adapting his own play) and from poetry anthologies, which are the chief resource for the characters' chattering, flighty, competitive dialogue.

Richard Griffiths leads the ensemble cast as the head chatterer: a waddling, walrusy old teacher in a boys' secondary school in Yorkshire, who amuses his pupils with games, songs and wistful gropes. His antagonist (Stephen Campbell Moore) is a slim young part-timer, equally gay and closeted, who's been hired to prepare the best students for entrance exams at Oxford and Cambridge. A handful of these multiethnic middle-class lads have a chance to step up in the world. Is that what education is for?

The new man talks as if knowledge is just flash; the old one insists it has meaning. (Here, too, the Holocaust comes in for discussion, as a reality not to be trifled with.) Had David Hare written *The History Boys*, that would have been the whole movie: a canned debate between postmodernism and tradition. So thank God for Alan Bennett. He knows there's a school corridor where the two sides can meet, in disappointment and longing, and smile over secrets that were never much concealed.

You should watch Griffiths and Moore do that. There's real style in their acting. The substance is a joy. ■

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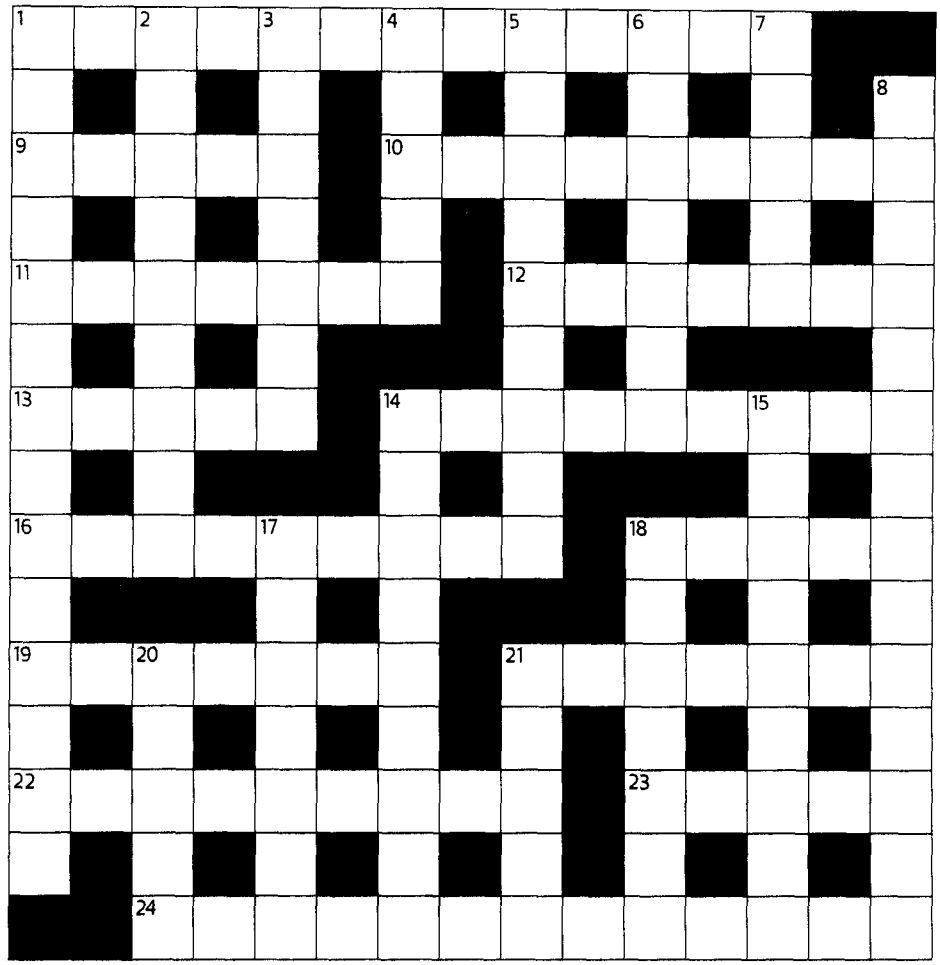
PUZZLE NO. 3063

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Two of the very stupid type have one country, and make a killing. (13)

9 Better see this there—it's very short. (5)

10 The old (and petty) officer has to make a grab for the lamppost. (9)

11 An official at the race who is just a beginner at the business. (7)

12 Mineral furnishing a sort of clue to sort of tie the last part. (7)

13 Is the G.I. due to lead the group? (5)

14 It takes a little work to iron things out, alternatively, for someone like Nero. (9)

16 Bill may have just the stuff they are responsible for, though rags never waver. (9)

18 Such a column really shows style! (Act something less than rich when you see it.) (5)

19 Do needlework? Let's finish it, sort of. (Tells on you, possibly.) (7)

21 The made-up ode is about a true situation in reality. (2,5)

22 Finished what is started, with the tree serving to completely flummox one! (9)

23 Plurals sometimes do, according to our requirements. (5)

24 How we are supposed to act, according to declaration. (13)

DOWN

1 A hint to choose a certain car? (It arises from oneself, as a means of changing behavior.) (14)

2 What one hopes to be doing successfully, after getting in deep. (There's a big one in California looking at you!) (9)

3 How to get things wrapped up, if the female and the male get at the heart of it. (7)

4 Bring upon oneself some dire consequences, though not found out with a little mutt. (5)

5 Some of those players near home, given the air. (Having put something in the pot, runs.) (9)

6 Where to find representatives conducted by one's own staff. (2,5)

7 The girl who didn't want to be ruthless? (5)

8 Only most of the trick—oily flowing about you and me—in an insincere manner. (14)

14 Implying too much nap when you do it. (9)

15 Most firm when a short street leads right to a bit less than a hundred taking the examination. (9)

17 Evidently nothing is paid for, though it is still permitted. (7)

18 Shield an example of the French way to use an epee. (7)

20 A famous fountain has green rising on one. (5)

21 The bad spirit of the German on this? (5)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 3062

	D	I	C	T	A	T	O	R	I	A	L	L	Y	
D		A		A		E		L		A				H
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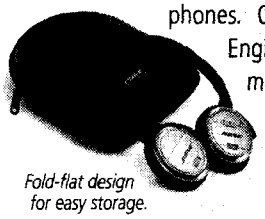

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